

WE BUILT AND DESTROYED

By
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FOREWORD

THIS IS NOT a book to be read by travellers. Nor is it intended for the benefit of the many people who have lived and worked in the East.

I left England, and returned, a young man, with a mind open to receive impressions and scan them with the impartial eye of the outsider. The only aim of this book is to record without dramatic colouring or biased opinion the things I saw and felt and experienced. That explains the use of the first person, for in no other way could this object be achieved.

I have made no attempt to chronicle the war in Malaya; I have no authority with which to debate that issue. Any impressions are merely those of a civilian observer.

For the young man desirous of taking up Colonial Service the book will answer many questions, replies to which I found were lacking in the Government Brochures when I studied the matter the first time myself.

To this young man a word of warning will not be amiss. The warning is this: if your aim is to make money, you will fail, for the high pay is not proportional in the East; if you enter the Service thinking that it is a life of ease and pleasure, you will end in misery, for the only way to live in Malaya is to get up at dawn and work until dusk, and even then your leisure hours will drag unless you are eager to exert your brain and body; but if you go East to serve, realizing that you are to fill a corner in the Empire system, remembering that you are one of few leading many, responsible by your actions and attitude for the building or destruction of that prestige on which the life of our Empire still depends, then I wish you luck and one day hope to meet you there.

For to serve, to create, to mould, were my reasons for joining the Service. Because of these, in spite of having lost all my possessions and savings, broken my career and prejudiced my future, I have no regrets. I made friends, which are Life's antidote for anything; I saw the World;

I learned to appreciate the Government's task in the War which covers the whole Empire; and I found my vocation.

The average reader will find thrills and humorous scenes, but the underlying motive has been to portray the life of an ordinary boy who was lifted from the fireside of a middle-class home to a spot eight thousand miles away where he was surrounded by people strange and brown or yellow or black, all eyeing him with that challenging stare which implies 'You are a White Man'.

CHAPTER I

PERHAPS ONE DAY I shall return to Singapore.

I am not sure yet if I really want to, for my first visit, and all that happened, all the sights I saw in Malaya, have left an ache which would tighten if I saw the familiar things again.

The early November morning in 1940 was cold and wet and grey, not the sort of day one would wish to remember after saying good-bye to Home for three or four years. I hurried along to the small railway station in north-east Lancashire; I was late, and had to catch the train which was to take me to the ship.

On that day I was to take the first step towards the realization of an ambition which had grown within me for more than two years. My name had been with the Crown Agents for a year when the post in Malaya was offered to me in July, and I had waited four months for the passage on the P. & O. steamer. The appointment was that of Assistant Engineer in the Malayan Public Works Service.

The details regarding sailing were secret, and none of my friends knew of my departure. I was thankful for the company of the solitary one who was hurrying by my side, although we could not waste breath on words as we bent our heads against the rain.

The train was beginning to move when I jumped aboard, and I could do no more than shout a hasty 'Good-bye' as the door slammed behind me. That was a good thing, I suppose; lingering farewells are painful, and my heart was very full.

I was just twenty-four. This was my first parting from Home, in circumstances which were anxious. Shipping losses in the previous few weeks had been heavy, and I knew that my parents, though behind me in all my decisions, didn't really want me to go East.

As the train gathered speed, and I my breath, I was glad to recognize two friends among the passengers to whom I was able to chatter in an effort to bury my real feelings. We played cards until they alighted a little farther on, and they wished me luck as they left the compartment.

Once alone, I glanced at the small case in the rack, at its large coloured labels, at the huge words 'London to Singapore', and relapsed into a whirlpool of thoughts. What did the future hold for me? Should I be able to get back into a position at home if I were a failure? Would my constitution stand up to the Tropics? In spite of my sound training and enthusiasm for my work, I wondered if my first tour would meet with success.

I was feeling very lonely and a little restless by the time the train pulled into Preston. I had to get out and await a connection, and so went for a coffee to take the clammy chill away. Walking down the platform afterwards I recognized a familiar profile, and hurried to greet Frank Duckworth, one of the members of my old gang of friends in Colne, my home. He was going for an interview with the object of becoming a wireless operator in the Merchant Navy, and we were glad of the opportunity of a chat before we went our different ways.

We travelled together to Liverpool, and he left me at the entrance to the Docks, promising to pass on my good wishes to our mutual friends. I walked along to the already crowded Customs Office, and a few hours later stepped off Canada Dock to go aboard *S.S. Narkunda*.

My adventure had begun.

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The ship was filled to capacity. As I watched the baggage being swung in cradles from the wharf to the forward hold, the labels showed Bombay, Singapore, and Hong Kong. The passengers consisted of rubber planters and Government officials returning from leave, and wives and children going back to their husbands in Malaya or India. The smoke-room had been taken over by sixty Marines, and the Second Class accommodated Dutch youths who were going to Java to join the Dutch Navy, and a few Sergeant Pilots of the R.A.F.

Loading continued all day, and at night the bombers came over. We were not allowed off the ship, and the weather was bad, so we stayed in the lounge whilst the ack-ack battered overhead and the wavering roar of the German aircraft filled the air. No bombs were dropped on the docks, and we went to bed in quietness.

The *Narkunda* did not sail until the third day, a Thursday. We were pulled out by tugs to the mouth, and took our place in the estuary. I saw a French hospital ship, and an assortment of cargo vessels of all nationalities, with destroyers moving around assembling the convoy. We anchored at two o'clock, and sailed at dusk, leaving the convoy behind.

Sunderlands and Spitfires flew out to see us for the first twenty-four hours, and at last we were on the high seas, sailing north-west. The weather turned colder, and the seas worsened as we reached mid-Atlantic.

I would not have thought it possible to feel so lonely in the midst of a crowd as I felt during the first few days of sailing. The weather was bad, so that it was necessary to stay inside for the most part. Miserable groups sat in the overcrowded lounge, reading and knitting and smoking until the air was stifling. A quartet of women made themselves extremely unpopular by playing Bridge in a noisy, thoughtless fashion, and anyone who dared to laugh above the normal pitch or volume of the conversation became the centre of attention.

A very brave man risked his popularity one evening by sitting at the grand piano and playing a liting waltz in a quiet, restful manner. The effect was to rouse the passengers from their morbid silence to animated conversation, and one or two courageous souls applauded gently as he finished. He smiled, bowed, and played a ballad. Interest grew, and appreciation was more manifest when the second number finished. For half an hour the pianist sweetened the air, and the faces of the passengers told of their quickened interest.

"Who is he?" could be heard running round the lounge, as people sat up to take notice.

He was Mr Willians, the young Director of Music for Singapore, and he did more to cheer the dullness of that dreary shipload than any other man aboard, for his recitals became a popular feature each evening.

After dinner one evening, as I was preparing to rise, a fellow-diner suggested a walk. We went on deck, and paused awhile until our eyes became accustomed to the almost total darkness.

"Your first trip?" inquired my fellow-passenger, with a pronounced Scottish accent.

I told him that it was, and he asked me where I was going. We began to pace the deck.

"Well, we'll be eating together, so we might as well know each other," he suggested. "My name's Young; what's yours?"

I told him, and thanked Heaven for Scotsmen; for had there been all English aboard I am sure I should not have met a soul during the whole of the trip.

We talked about things I wanted to know—about Asiatics, and customs, ways of living, social life, dress, and many things I had still to discover. That walk was the forerunner of many, and the feeling of loneliness passed as Young introduced me to other passengers he had met as the days went by.

A gradual improvement in the weather told us that we were going south, and it was possible to play deck games after a week or so.

On the eleventh day a small cargo vessel was seen very high out of the water flashing signals to us. The message told us that the captain had been dangerously ill for three days, with a temperature of 104, and there was no doctor aboard.

We hove to, and a boat was lowered in the heavy sea. The first attempt was a failure, for the small craft was carried away, and we had to chase after it. The men on the *St. Marie II*—the ship we sought to assist—let down the sick man on a stretcher into their own lifeboat, and pulled across to our port side. The single blanket was removed from the patient's body, and he lay in his pyjamas on the stretcher, exposed to the cold sea air, panting for breath, his face the ghastly blue pallor of death.

The dying man was strapped in a canvas bag and hauled aboard, his papers and suitcase of clothes following him aboard. As the sailors pulled away they shouted out: "Are we downhearted?" and gave the Churchill salute with sturdy thumbs.

The captain of the *St. Marie II* died overnight and was buried at sea on the following morning. A fitting end, I suppose, for a man who had spent his life along the trade routes of the world, doing his unspectacular job in peace-time; and was still taking his ship through dangerous seas when war covered half the world and Britain's lifelines were in peril.

I saw flying fish for the first time one Sunday in November. The sea was calm, hardly a ripple showing on the water, the small silver fish leaping from the surface and gliding from crest to crest of the light swell, tipping the water with a tiny fleck of spray, flying for half a mile with incredible speed like gleaming swallows.

On the following Tuesday the shores of Africa came into view, at first a dim grey line in the morning light, then changing to more solid form as the palm-clad coastline drew nearer. The *Narkunda* steamed into the harbour of Freetown, Sierra Leone, past the slender native canoes

whose sole occupants waved spear-shaped paddles in salute, to the anchorage opposite the oil tanks.

One side of the wide natural harbour was flat and swampy, with palms and low vegetation in abundance. The other side was fringed with hills, Government buildings and quarters lining the slopes, and a lighthouse on the headland.

We had hardly anchored when a hundred or more native canoes came alongside, the West Africans grabbing the lines and the projections to hold their long, light craft against the strong current. They wore the strangest mixture of clothes. Battered topees, Balaclava helmets, old peak caps from some ships' officers, soft felts, and even a very much blitzed silk topper graced one bullet head. Shirts were various, all very dirty, but originally made of the loudest hues of material. The favourite nether garments were khaki shorts tied with old rope. One or two of this company of performers and salesmen were puffing at briar pipes, others smoked cigarettes thrown to them by the passengers.

The crowd could be classified into three categories: the salesmen, the divers, and the entertainers. The salesmen threw weighted ropes to the main deck, and selling began. In most cases it was barter, an old shirt or jersey passing down the rope in a basket, subjected to a close examination, and exchanged, if accepted, for a dozen oranges or bananas. Hand-woven baskets were sold for a shilling to five shillings. Monkeys were offered for sale, but none were bought by our ship.

The divers were single occupants of small canoes, and wore loin-cloths only. They called out for 'English pennies' and 'Liverpool sixpence', their huge eyes scanning the crowded decks for signs of money. When a coin was thrown, the diver fell into the water after it, and appeared a few moments later with it between his teeth. 'May the Lord bless your soul' was the favourite formula of one of them as he crawled skilfully back into his craft.

The entertainers regaled us with song, the popular numbers being the 'Lambeth Walk' and 'Run, Rabbit, Run', which took on a new aspect when sung in negro fashion by deep, thick voices, the performers clapping their hands and slapping their thighs and laughing with wicked gurgles and a show of huge white teeth.

We steamed out at 1 p.m. the next day, having filled our bunkers with oil, and passed through the boom and the shallow waters near the lighthouse, where the mainmasts and funnels of two wrecks rose grimly above the surface.

The ship crossed the Equator on Friday morning, and on the following Friday I awoke to see Table Mountain and the Lion Peaks of Capetown rising from the morning mists. The table-cloth was laid on the Mountain, a thin, wispy layer of white cloud, its edges falling gracefully over the edge and filling the crevices like a lacy fringe.

We were pushed into dock by the tugs, and I went ashore, the firm ground feeling strange after twenty-five days on shipboard. It was early summer, and the sun was almost vertical overhead, but not oppressive. I wandered about the streets, drinking in the sights and pausing to buy souvenirs in the shops. The Flower Market was ablaze with colour and full of activity, the negro sellers sitting on the footpath

alongside the post office, occupying a whole street. The Fruit Market was busy, peaches, plums, bananas, pineapples, and strawberries filling the air with their sweetness.

In the evening a party went to the pictures, and walked through the fully lit streets amongst the neon signs and headlamps—such a strange contrast with England's black-out. We found our way to the Del Monico, which every visitor to Capetown should see. The interior is a perfect reproduction of a Spanish courtyard, with a paved floor, and soft lanterns hanging from stucco walls. Balconies overlooked the central area, and a blue sky with twinkling stars and vaporous night clouds added realism to the tiled roofs and tiny windows.

On the next morning we ascended Table Mountain, first by bus and then by the Cable Railway. The view from the swinging cage as it climbed steeply to a height of four thousand feet was the experience of a lifetime. Table Bay spread out as a map, and the city and suburbs made a motley pattern beneath us. The plains rolled out to the distant foothills, finally losing themselves in a misty blue. At the top we scrambled over the rocks to drink in the air and marvel at the view. A silver plane flew past us, and that was my first view of an aircraft from above. It circled the Lion Peaks and rounded the end of the Mountain, a thousand feet below us.

We returned to the *Narkunda*, and steamed out of Capetown in the early evening, filled with memories of the grandeur of the scenery and the life and colour of the city.

The days that followed were hot and windless, and the nights a trial, with closed portholes and baffled entrances. The moon was at the full, and we were able to dance on deck, but the breathless air made us perspire, an hour being sufficient to exhaust us. The ship was overcrowded, and the laundry was unable to take orders, so I took to washing clothes myself. This soon became an endless task, for it was necessary to change several times a day to keep cool, and I awoke each morning in a bath of perspiration.

We had already tied up in Mombasa, Kenya, when I rose on the 15th of December. We had only a few hours to spare, so I went ashore at once.

Mombasa, normally a quiet, small place, was the scene of great activity on that day. Five troopships came in during the morning, and the docks were full of military vehicles and equipment and men. After a short walk up the street to the post office and the shops, I returned to the ship.

We sailed in the early evening, and I wondered what was brewing in Mombasa. We were soon to know, for a few days later we heard of the attack through Kenya into Somaliland, leading to the successful British campaign in Abyssinia.

One Sunday we saw the Indian coast-line as dawn broke, and entered Bombay later in the morning. I changed some of my money for rupees and went ashore after saying good-bye to some of my friends who were leaving the ship.

The traveller's first impression of Bombay is not a pleasant one. For over a mile, as I walked into the city, I was shadowed by beggars

and hawkers and roadside entertainers. Lame and blind men slept on the foot-paths, urchins appealed for coin, dirty Indians with scraggy beards and ragged clothes tried to sell me lewd post cards. Every twenty yards a gharry drawn by an ancient, undernourished horse drew up and I was invited to ride into town. The smell was awful, there was dust and horse-dung everywhere. The prospect of four days celebrating Christmas in Bombay was sickening, and I wondered how I should fill the time.

I watched a hockey match—played on a beautiful grass pitch in the city—and walked around the 'Oval', a public recreation ground. It was Sunday, and the Asiatic population was out in its best clothes. After a time the sultry heat and the dust tired me, and I returned to the ship.

The following morning I wandered round the docks, and spent some time admiring the light cruiser *Leander* as she lay in dry dock being scraped and painted. I walked aimlessly into the city, and a guide pointed out the principal sights and buildings. At his suggestion I went on to Victoria Gardens and watched the antics of the birds and animals and Asiatic children with their mothers.

The Taj Mahal Hotel was crowded, as were all the other places where Europeans could be entertained, for many had come down to Bombay for their Christmas Holiday. In the evening I went to the cinema, for there was apparently nowhere else to go.

Christmas Eve was a shopping day, and a small party decided to absorb a little local colour by visiting the Asiatic quarters. We walked the dusty streets, looking in at bazaars and eating-houses, the smell of dung and sandalwood and incense filling our lungs, and dust choking our throats and burning into our eyes. The pavement was dotted with huge red patches where the Indians had spat out their filthy betel-nut juice, and I began to feel sick. So this was the East—which I had chosen to make my home.

We took a taxi to the European shops, thankful for the relief, and saw the residents buying their Christmas gifts: toys and chocolates and cloth and hardware from England. We had one desire in common when we returned at last to the ship—to be on our way.

Christmas Day was uneventful excepting for the meal which was provided on board. This was a triumph of the cook's art, and the saloon was gaily decorated with all the Allied flags.

We left at 10.15 the next day—the *Narkunda* having disgorged its sand ballast and taken on cotton and spirits—said good-bye to the Marines and many of the passengers, and sorted out cabins for a more comfortable journey. Nobody was sorry to leave Bombay, for we were eager to finish the trip, and Christmas had been dull and uninteresting, hot and dry.

Colombo Harbour was the third port to be entered on a Sunday. We anchored in the middle of the harbour and I went ashore on the tender.

The city was quiet, and I was struck by its clean streets and pleasant lay-out. A few shops were open, and I enjoyed an hour bargaining with the shopkeepers for moonstone necklaces and hammered brassware. In the afternoon a youth and myself took rickshaws to Victoria Park, where grew trees of cinnamon, rubber, eucalyptus, bay, papaya, breadfruit, and

a host of other fruits. In the Galle Face Hotel we cooled ourselves with a drink and a swim in the fresh-water pool, and walked back along the smart promenade to the jetty. The evening sky was lit by brilliant blue flashes that told of an impending storm, and we had only just reached the ship when rain began to fall.

We left on the following morning and ran into fog when we reached the open sea. As night fell the sky grew leaden and the air heavy. Bright lights covered the sky, and soon we were in the middle of a tropical storm such as I had never seen before. Blinding flashes of lightning lit the decks and sparkled the water, which poured in a single sheet from the deckheads, great rolling crashes of thunder rang through our heads, and the noise of the rain beating on the sea was like a huge river falling over a rock face in a flood. Visibility was nil, and the fog-horn was sounded. To our consternation there was a reply at very close range, and the engines were shut off. For half an hour we floated in the storm, unable to see ahead, sounding the horn until the replies grew fainter. At last we moved ahead, and a strong wind sprang up as the storm died down.

New Year's Eve was celebrated with enthusiasm, for it meant not only the beginning of another year, but the end of our journey. One passenger suggested that the New Year Party was a greater success than Christmas, probably because there were more Scotsmen than Christians aboard. The night wore on to the strains of the ship's small orchestra, and we danced until after midnight. The first two hours of my 1941 were spent in the cabin of one of the ship's engineers, drinking toasts and eating nuts, cake, and chocolates. There I discovered that this was to be the last run for the *Narkunda* as a passenger liner, that she would be a trooper on her next run from home. Many of the engineers were going to leave her at Singapore and join the *Île de France*, which had put in at the British port when France capitulated, and was to be taken over by the Allies.

On New Year's night I was one of the passengers privileged to entertain a number of young Naval Ratings who were going to Singapore. We were in the Second Class saloon, and an impromptu concert was arranged. I made six new friends that evening, and have often wondered since what happened to these boys who had left their homes for the first time.

We docked early at Penang on the morning of the 3rd January, 1941, and I watched my baggage ashore. I had a little difficulty at the Customs, for only a Malay was on duty at the time and he spoke no English. He was asking me if I had anything to declare, but I understood not a word. He gave me a list to read. It was written in Romanized Malay, and I was able to recognize a few words which I had picked up by reading elementary Malay vocabularies whilst sailing. Very earnestly and vehemently I assured him that I had nothing of dutiable nature, and he let me go after opening one bag.

I walked from the wharf to the large cream-painted building near by and reported at the Settlement Engineer's Office. There I met an Assistant Engineer named Grehan, who helped me to dispose of my baggage and then took me for lunch.

Grehan was at that time living in a flat, part of a block run by the Government for bachelors. He could see the Élysée Cabaret across the road and the E. & O. Hotel was round the corner. As we ate lunch—made and served by his Malay boy—Grehan talked, I listened. First he told me that my tour would be for four years, not three. The Government always extended the first tour, he said. Then he spoke of the work, and my status. He referred drily to the 'P.W.R.'—his pet abbreviation for 'Prestige of the White Races'—and suggested that there was not much left as far as he could see.

I had no tropical clothes, and the clothes I had put on, although the lightest I had, were heavy on me. I felt hot and uncomfortable, tired and weary. Grehan suggested that I might like to change, and he took me to the Rest House, where temporary accommodation had been booked.

I went to the bedroom. The bed intrigued me. The mattress was covered by a single sheet, and a thin cotton blanket lay folded at the foot. The circular mosquito net was hitched up, and I could see the two pillows at the head, and a long, sausage-like affair about two feet long and nine inches diameter laid lengthwise down the centre of the mattress. The lady of the house laughed at my ignorance and explained that in Malaya one got on to, not into, the bed. The sausage was a 'Dutch wife'. The idea was to twist one's arms and legs round the bolster so that air was free to circulate round the body, thus enabling the sleeper to keep cool. The idea was repulsive to me, and I never used the thing. I have not found out to this day why it was called a Dutch Wife, and I have often wondered what the Dutch thought about it.

That night I went to bed with my mind full of many things.

CHAPTER II

THE NEXT FEW days were spent in inspections of the island with the young engineer who was to hand over, and in meeting the contractors and staff with whom I was to work.

Penang Island possesses everything that could be desired by a young man. The town—Georgetown—has its shops and cinemas and two cabarets. There is a Turf Club and Sports Club, and a Swimming Pool, north of the town. My duties as Assistant Engineer covered the supervision of the road which runs forty-six miles round the coast, the roads within the Island, Glugor Seaplane Base, the Aerodrome at Bayan Lepas, Penang Hill—which is the local holiday spot—and all Government buildings and civil engineering works on the Island. Within a few days I had formed the opinion that if this was service in the East I had no desire for anything better.

On the first Saturday night, Grehan and a friend named Wright took me to the Élysée Cabaret. There was no admission charge, and as we entered the huge, softly-lit dance hall, a Chinese ushered us into seats at a vacant table.

The Filipino Band was playing a waltz, and my eyes wandered to the couples on the ball-room floor. Chinese, Malay, and Eurasian girls were dancing with Asiatic and European partners, and a few white women were present. The air was heavy with perfume, the music from the guitars was stirring and strange.

I must have been silent for some moments, for Wright addressed me with a smile.

"Well, what do you think of them?" he asked.

"Think of whom?"

"The Taxi Girls. Like to dance with one?" He called a boy and bought a book of tickets.

The dance was over, and the girls walked back to their tables, set round the edge of the dancing space. I imagined that the lights were dim to add glamour to their dark skins and lustrous black hair. The Chinese wore long, tight-fitting dresses down to the ankles, split at the sides to knee height, whilst the Eurasians wore European-style evening gowns. They glided rather than walked to their seats.

"Not so keen," I said.

Wright laughed. "You will be after you've been here a few months."

The next dance started, and my companions jumped up and hurried to select their partners. I watched them as they moved round the floor, and thought that perhaps I would try the next time.

On their return, I informed them of my intention, and they warned me to be quick off the mark, or I should be left with the stragglers, the new girls or the ugly ones, who either couldn't dance or couldn't speak.

As soon as the music started I made for the floor, and was surprised to find that already half of the dancers had been taken. I must be quicker next time, I thought, as I looked along the line of impassive faces.

I picked a dancer who looked reasonably tall, for I had noticed that the girls were short of stature. I had no need to speak, for as soon as I approached her the Chinese stood up and laid her bag on the table.

She was warm. As I took her right hand I could feel the moisture on her fingers. Her dress was soaked at the back and she reeked of perspiration. There was an even heavier smell hanging about her—a mixture of onions and cheap perfume. I felt sick, but thought that perhaps I was new to the game and would soon enjoy it as much as the others.

The dance ended in a very short time, and I murmured a word of thanks. The girl was not interested, but turned and walked to her place. I fled to the table where my friends were awaiting my return.

They asked me how I had fared, and I complained of the smell. They laughed and said that I'd have to get used to it. All the Asiatics ate garlic.

I sat out the next dance, then suddenly realized that I had forgotten to give the girl a ticket. My friends told me that that would lose the girl her commission, and possibly get her into trouble.

"See the fellow sitting at the desk there?" indicated Grehan. I followed his finger to a dark corner at the side of the stage, where a Chinese was scrutinizing the dancers and making entries in a book. "He

keeps a record of every dance by every taxi-girl, and they have to tally with the tickets."

The next dance was a slow foxtrot, and I resolved to find my partner and have another dance with her so that I could pay her her dues. We took our places on the crowded floor.

I enjoy a slow foxtrot more than any other dance, and this was a very good one indeed. For that reason it may be that I danced better than on my first attempt. My partner danced well, and we had gone perhaps once round the floor when she laid her head on my shoulder and pulled me tighter towards her.

The most uncomfortable experience a man can have when dancing is to be excited. I could feel the girl's thighs against mine, and she was wearing very little. The colour rose in my cheeks; I tried to unclasp her by executing an open step at a corner, but she melted back into my arms as soon as the figure was finished. Not a word was spoken. I had to admit that she knew how to dance, and her knowledge did not stop at dancing.

When the music ceased, I pressed two tickets into the girl's hot hand and hurried away. Grehan and Wright suggested that we might have a look in at the other Cabaret, and I agreed readily.

The Wembley Cabaret was not so attractive a building, but the band was even better than that in the Elysée, and the girls were more beautiful. I had no desire to dance any more, but Grehan and Wright took tickets and picked out their partners. They pointed out to me the choicest of the taxi-girls there, but I was not interested. I was glad when midnight came and the Cabaret closed.

On the following Monday I was introduced to the Malayan system of paying coolies. Early after lunch we returned to the office, and the Chief Clerk handed us two attaché cases and their keys. A small detachment of Sikh police met us as we left the building, and the sergeant sat in the front of our car, the remainder following in a police car. The first place for payment was the P.W.D. Workshop, off Brick Kiln Road. We drove into the yard, and opened one bag on a table in an open shed. As we did so, the police fixed bayonets and arranged themselves behind the group of Asiatic Overseers who were to assist in distribution.

The money was in ten-, five-, and one-dollar bills, and coins ranging in value from one cent to fifty. As the name of a coolie was called from the Check Roll, the money was counted out, passed to an Overseer for checking, and handed over. My companion was reading the names, written by the Overseers on the Rolls, and I was baffled at the thought that I should have to carry out payments myself the next time. I could not imagine myself calling with anything like accuracy or confidence such names as Narayanasamy or Ishmael bin Isahak.

Several thousand dollars were paid out in two hours, and at the end of the payment the remainder was checked against the absentees. Any error was to be made good by the Engineer, unless there was a credit balance, when that was to be put into Revenue—a ruling which I always thought was rather hard on the Engineer.

When the day's payment was over the bags were taken to the police station and locked in a special safe pending collection for further payments

on the morrow. A very different procedure from the pay envelopes at home.

Three weeks after my arrival in Penang I was taken by my Chief on an inspection of the lighthouses on the Island. The easiest way to reach the points is by launch, and at eight o'clock one Sunday morning a small party boarded the craft hired for the purpose. It was a large house-boat, with four tiny cabins, a covered space for lounging, and a diminutive saloon seating six. We had loaded up with food and drinks and took cameras and swimming costumes so that the day could combine work with pleasure.

We coasted round the Island, stopping at the inspection points and trudging up the steep headland slopes to the lighthouses. The last building had been visited by noon, and the day was ours.

After tiffin and a drowsy hour in the shade, we ordered the Malay skipper to weigh anchor and make for home. We were gliding past the landing-stage at Glugor as darkness fell, and a little later threaded in and out of the ancient junks and tongkangs to the wharf. This, I thought, was the ideal way to do a day's work.

The next two days were a holiday, Chinese New Year. On the Tuesday evening I was to eat Chinese Chow as the guest of Wei Fung Cheong Tim, a wealthy shopkeeper whose manager, Mr. Lee, was friendly with a fellow-boarder at the Guest House where I was staying.

The time appointed was five o'clock, and we entered the large shop to see a circular table set in the middle of the floor. At each of the eight places prepared were two ivory chopsticks, two small, deep bowls, and a moist cloth laid on the edge.

I was introduced to Mr. Lee, who spoke perfect English, and to the other five guests, all Chinese, members of the family or shop staff.

Once seated, I looked at my chopsticks with misgiving; Mr. Lee laughed, and showed me how to use them. The secret is to hold one stick rigid and move the other freely, so that instead of having two points moving erratically around the piece of food, one is stationary whilst the other clamps it. I practised a little on thin wooden toothpicks, and the Chinese rolled with good-natured laughter at my comic efforts.

The first course was shark's fin soup, a thick and glutinous delicacy with a wonderful flavour. This was eaten with china spoons, to my great relief.

The Chinese makes no bones about eating or drinking. If he enjoys the taste of a drink or a soup, he devours with gusto, making great sucking noises and smacking his lips and sighing with pleasure. In eating, he champs his jaws on the morsel without any attempt to silence the noise of chewing. If by chance the food produces gases during mastication, this is regarded as a very natural thing not requiring camouflage or excuse.

Do not mistake me: the gentlemen dining at that Chinese New Year meal were quite a good class of Chinese, respectable men, well-behaved and sober, well-dressed and extremely pleasant in conversation. But food prepared by the Chinese is so much superior to ours, so delicious and tasty, that it is no wonder that they have no desire to hide their appreciation behind murmured apology and discreetly sealed lips.

The soup was polished off amid sighs and smacking noises and great gurgles of intake. The success of the meal was assured.

The second course was a mould of dried oysters with a seaweed garnish. The reader is advised to try eating oysters with chopsticks; it is a trial of one's patience and a feat of endurance.

Course after course followed, each served in one central bowl, which was left on the table so that the guest could revert to a previous course at will. There were fried prawns with sliced cucumber, a whole filleted duck covered with finely mashed vegetables, a complete fish, head and tail intact, fried in tomato sauce, chopped chicken and ham, and Shanghai sausage, which is a mixture of all manner of cooked meats—fowl and liver and beef—cut into strips.

The rice course was the last. Boiled rice was brought on, and it was possible to pick it from the bowl grain by grain, so well cooked and drained that it had retained its granular shape and lost none of its flavour. We picked some scraps of fish and duck and oysters from the by now large collection of bowls placed in the centre of the table.

A cup of China tea, unsweetened and without milk, concluded the meal. We returned home feeling that we had learnt a good deal about the Chinese, and would not hesitate at any invitation to partake of their hospitality again.

Within a month I had settled down to the life and customs, and steady drilling by my Malay *munshi* three evenings a week widened my knowledge of the tongue. I was able to give orders to the boys, to buy in the shops, and talk in a limited way to the contractors and mandores on my jobs.

I had bought a car, and was advised to engage a *sais* until I had become familiar with the lay-out of the island and the traffic regulations. One day a small, erect figure strutted into my office, saluted smartly, with a respectful "*Tabek, tuan*", and handed me his credentials. He was a Javanese, about twenty-four years of age, and gloried in the name of Hussein bin Amin.

After a few moments' questioning, when I had to call on outside help to interpret for us, the lad was engaged. A few days later he reported for duty, and a little later I met his wife, a beautiful girl of eighteen, small and well-formed, with a flawless complexion, perfect teeth, and jet black hair which she dressed in a bun in the nape of her neck.

Hussein bin Amin remained with me for almost a year, and the circumstances of our parting were painful and unforgettable. Perhaps one day I shall be able to find him, and we shall start again.

The Europeans in Penang were friendly and hospitable, and very soon the Swimming Club became my favourite rendezvous. Three or four times each week I swam in the warm salt water, sometimes staying for a drink and perhaps a snack with the men in the lounge. I joined a Badminton Club, and played once a week at the house of some member of the Club. Invitations to tennis parties were numerous, and occasionally I dined with engineers or friends from the Swimming Club. The days passed quickly, and I was very contented, thankful also that my first station should be Penang, where the mosquito is almost unknown, and

the Sumatra springs up to fan the heat away and bring the cooling rain.

Monday, 10th February, was a holiday, the occasion being the Hindu Feast of Thai Pusam. I had been told of the sights I might expect, so I went early to witness the celebrations.

Thai Pusam is the day when Hindus pay homage to their gods, performing the most incredible acts of sacrifice and endurance. On the previous night the golden god was carried in great procession from the Temple in the town to that at Waterfall Road. On Monday morning began the ceremony

At the main Temple was collected a crowd of Tamils and their followers, and the priests presided over the ritual of the knives. Tiny knives and spikes were heated to a dull red and driven through the lips and cheeks of the men who volunteered to undergo the ordeal for the sake of their gods. A large bed of glowing coals burned fiercely on the Temple floor, and the worshippers ran barefoot across the fire to the accompaniment of ritual songs.

Heavy burdens were then fixed over the heads of the central figures in the ceremony. These weighed probably fifty pounds each, and were heavily carved models of temples or gods, executed in wood and painted with silver. Iron struts rested on the shoulders, and the burden was held in position by a hundred or more thin wire guys, the ends of which were pointed and hooked, and dug into the flesh of the breast and back.

As each burden was fixed, the performer was dusted with lime, and left the Temple with a priest and his followers. He began to dance erratically and unsteadily to the accompaniment of chanting and hand-clapping, jogging the burden up and down, turning round in mad circles, perspiration pouring from his face and back, his bare feet kicking up the dust of the street. There were about fifty of these men, and the procession moved towards Waterfall Temple, some four or five miles away.

There was no rest. The man must not sit down or lean against anyone for support. Sometimes I saw an exhausted Tamil stand swaying on his feet, with the teacher chanting madly at him, and his relations shouting words of encouragement.

We followed the crowd to the second Temple, as they turned to the left towards the hill. At the top of the hill, reached by two or three hundred very steep steps, was the Temple where the knives would be removed.

We ascended the slope leading to the steps, and saw a crowd round one of the Tamil bearers, gathered near a small shrine. The man was almost unable to stand. His eyes were closed, and the burden waved above his head so unsteadily that I thought it must surely fall. His face was streaked with perspiration, and saliva dripped from the sides of his mouth. He could not so much as moisten his lips, for a small brass knife skewered them together. The lime on his back and chest was smeared and lined with the sweat which poured relentlessly down from his neck and weary shoulders. The priest was shouting and chanting, dancers were working up into a mad fervour, and women were throwing lime dust on the suffering face and heaving chest.

For fully five minutes the crowd stood before the shrine. If the man were to fail at this stage, so near to the end of his ordeal, he would be in disgrace. At last his eyes opened, and he turned, very slowly and unsteadily, towards the steps. A great cheer rose in the air as he tottered and staggered for the last stage of his cruel journey.

The ceremony at the Temple on the hilltop was simple and brief. The knives and pins were removed carefully, the wound dusted with lime powder; then the worshippers were given a little coconut milk with which to anoint themselves. No blood flowed from the points where the knives had entered, a significant thing to the worshippers. As a point of fact, the red-hot blades cauterized where they pierced, and the lime kept the cuts dry and clean.

We descended the steps, stopping at times to give a cent to one or other of the hundreds of lame and blind who lay calling "*Tuan, tuan*", until we at last reached the road. We entered the Temple and visited the shrine where the golden god was set in state.

It was a pitiful scene. A Tamil stood guard over the image, and a priest was praying. The worshippers crept up towards the shrine with downcast eyes and hands clasped before their lips, backs bent in submission. As they reached the arch through which the small golden figure could be seen, they stretched out nervous fingers and dropped money into an earthenware jar, the top of which was covered with a slit leather sheet. Silent words moved their lips as they passed before their god, and more money was given to the priest if they desired a prayer to be delivered in their names.

We passed into the courtyard where the poor were being fed. They squatted—men, women, and children—on the paved surface, with part of a banana leaf spread before them. The food was brought in. First the rice, in a huge wooden bucket, then a sickly yellow mess of curry, dished out on to the leaf with wooden ladles.

Outside, the throng of women and children were washing their feet and faces in the stream which passed the Temple. Small boys bathed naked in the yellow water. The atmosphere here was more jubilant, something of the atmosphere of a Sunday School bun-fight. •

In the wood behind the Temple were entertainers, salesmen, and beggars. Tamil families sat in the kindly shade watching the show, and we watched the Tamil families. An unfortunate man was sitting with his two wives, one on either side of him. One was young and gay, the other probably did the housework. As we passed, the older woman made a comment to her husband. The young woman interrupted with a few sharp words, and laughed. The man sat for a moment, and neither woman spoke. Suddenly he swung round and knocked the younger wife flat on her face, at the same time pouring out a savage stream of what we imagined was invective. The old wife said nothing, made no sign; she was the wiser of the two. The younger woman sat up again, set her hair straight, and stroked the back of her neck where the cuff had made contact. A few more years of that, thought I, and you will be as wise as the older.

We left the pagan scene, wondering at the strength of the Faith, the power of the religion on these people, and the effect that could be pro-

duced by a golden image with a few diamonds studded in it, tawdry trappings and a bit of burning sandalwood.

On the following evening my *munshi*, a schoolmaster named Isahak, took me to the Malay Borea. This curious festival consisted of a series of competitions, which commenced at eight-thirty each night and finished at five in the morning, running for a week.

We entered the open-air theatre and sat on the front row amongst Malays and Chinese. The concert opened with an item by an amateur troupe playing guitars and ukuleles, dancing, and singing. That was followed by a sketch in Malay, and I was able to follow parts of the dialogue with the help of my teacher.

By midnight I was feeling tired, and still the concert went on, party after party of young Malays giving turns and sketches. I had a shock when one troupe played and sang 'The Siegfried Line' in their own style, with words in Malay. I was reminded of the early popularity of the song in 1939, and its sudden disappearance when France collapsed. Perhaps these young people had not heard of that, I mused.

There was a crack at the Nazis in one item. A Malay delicacy, *pisang goreng*, was worked into a joke on Hitler's fat friend, Hermann. The Malay words mean 'fried banana', and a few days later Isahak brought me a few of these titbits as a special treat.

In the course of time, with the characteristic slowness of the English, the boarders at the Guest House thawed out, and I became acquainted with Mr. Yell, an elderly man of fine physique and abounding energy, with two officers of the Indian Army Service Corps, and a young bachelor who was head tailor at Pritchard's, a European-owned store. Still I felt lonely, restless, a stranger in a strange land, and my hostess's gushing sympathy did little to settle my mind.

Then one evening I walked into the dining-room to my accustomed table and met a new arrival. He was a black-haired, slight-built Scot, a little older than myself. After the overdone introductions by the hostess, we edged our way into conversation. I was at a loss, because the Englishman's safety-valve—the weather—is not considered a relevant topic in a country where the climate varies little between the extremes of burning sunshine and pouring rain. But my new acquaintance, being a Scot, maintained a steady flow of conversation, and soon we were talking freely.

"You're new here, aren't you?" he asked.

"Yes, came a few days ago only," I replied, knowing that he knew by my fresh red face and the hints the landlady had dropped during introductions.

"Ah, well, you'll get used to it," he assured me; "I've been here three years. Due for leave soon."

The evening passed quickly, and my new friend, Alec Cockburn, offered to show me a few of his photographs and souvenirs. I followed him into his bedroom and spent an hour admiring a fine collection of carved ivory figures, silver ornaments, and hand-worked silks and laces.

"For my little girl," he ventured timidly, and pointed to a photograph standing on his dressing-table.

I knew then why I had felt so lonely, so restless, so strange in that quiet place. For I had left a girl behind me, wearing a ring and bearing

a promise. But so far I had met no friend who would invite confidence, and listen as I talked of home.

From that night onwards, slowly but very firmly, grew a friendship based on mutual sympathy. Alec and I swam, and danced, bargained with souvenir-sellers, saw the shows, compared the mails, exchanged photographs and stories from home, and lived our lives together.

He was busy opening a new branch of Grafton Laboratories, large manufacturing and wholesale chemists of Singapore. I could not help thinking that the job was too heavy for a single man to do, assisted only by an Asiatic clerk and an indifferent Malay errand-boy. Three years in Malay had affected his constitution, and he was due for a rest. But he was always cheerful, cracking jokes in his soft Scottish accent, calling me 'Doog' and jabbing my ribs as we shared a laugh.

One evening, as we sat in the lounge of the Guest House enjoying the cool of a Sumatra breeze which rustled the palms in the compound, Alec turned to me with an idea.

"Have you ever thought of moving into a Mess?" he asked.

"I only wish I could," I replied. "This place is costing too much. All Government places are full up."

Alec was silent for a moment, then spoke in a voice of hesitation.

"I know a place where we could get in next week," he ventured, "but I'm not sure you'd like it. There are three chaps in there now. One of them has been keeping a Siamese, and wants her to live with him, so the other two are throwing him out. He's going in a few days."

"Well, we could meet the other two," I suggested, and it was agreed.

On the following evening we inspected the Mess, a large Chinese-owned house in Burmah Lane, with cream walls and red-tiled roof, standing in spacious, ill-kept grounds, its kitchen and servants' quarters connecting with the main building by means of a covered way.

A Lancashire man of thirty and a young Scot of twenty-three were sipping whisky-sodas when we entered the lounge. The room was furnished with rotan chairs and tables; a single large fan swirled silently overhead, and a wireless set crackled noisily against a background of dance music.

The Lancashire man, a cotton agent, furnished us with details as to the rent, average monthly costs, and general details regarding the house. We asked about the staff, and the cook was summoned.

He was a fat Chinese, the fattest I have ever seen. His thinly-clad belly shook as he pattered in on small, lightly-shod feet. He smiled. I never saw his face in any other expression save that bland, meaningless but mirth-provoking smile. Behind that perpetual smile his small, dark, almond eyes twinkled with the roguery of youth. I think he would be over forty, but his smooth fat face and his gleaming teeth, his jovial figure and carefree style made accurate estimates impossible.

Alec and I agreed to move in after a week, and gave our notice to the Guest House landlady that evening.

The following Saturday afternoon was spent in ordering furniture, bedding, and odds and ends to fill our bedroom and spaces in the house created by the removal of the former occupant. We called on a Chinese cabinet-maker named Yoong Fatt, who promised to make a bedroom

suite to my own design within a fortnight, and to provide temporary furniture in the meantime.

We moved in one rainy evening, and spent the next few days in sorting our belongings, settling down for a long stay. Alec had little time to spare, as he was due to report for two months' full-time training with the Straits Settlements Volunteers at the week-end, and his work made even heavier demands on his time than before.

The week-end came, and my three messmates left for the Camp. I was alone, in charge of the Mess and the staff, knowing but a handful of Malay words and having no knowledge of the cost of food or the shortcomings of the Chinese cook. I was soon to learn by hard experience.

On the first evening the fat Chinese rolled in with *kira*—a small pocket-book in which he had entered his purchases daily. With the perpetual smile, which I was soon to recognize as part of his stock-in-trade, he handed the book to me for inspection.

I was flustered, nervous, apprehensive, as I tried to read the items written in Romanized Malay. Each day showed ten cents for a rickshaw, and varying amounts for firewood. Items there were for meat, eggs, vegetables, and seaweed, their prices impossible to check, but all adding to an appreciable daily sum, never less than three dollars.

I handed back the book, not knowing what to say. But the smiling Chinese remained. Heavens, I thought, he wants some money. I ventured the query: "*Berapa wang?*" ("How much money?") and he replied in Malay. I was not sure whether he said twenty or thirty dollars, for the words rolled out with a sound like soapy bubbles bursting in a wash-boiler. I produced two ten-dollar bills, and he accepted them with the same inscrutable smile, booked the amount in his *kira*, and withdrew.

When Alec called in after a week I poured out my troubles, and he gave me a number of practical hints to help me check the accounts.

"Don't worry, Doog," he laughed, "if you catch him out one way he'll swindle you another. If he can't get the satisfaction of making a dollar or two a month that way, he'll ask for more *gaji*."

I began to understand one of the many little things which, added together in one's daily life, made a weighty whole, that sum of worries and minor tribulations known, though not appreciated, by the stay-at-homes as 'The White Man's Burden'.

At the office I was asked to prepare designs for Air Raid Shelters, and an organization for Rescue and Demolition parties for the Department. On 6th March a trial black-out was held—the first of its kind in Penang. I rushed around blacking-out the Mess, an almost hopeless task in a building with open walls and airy rooms. Lights were dimmed, and the closed chick-blinds created an atmosphere of oppression and deadness as I sat alone in the lounge, wondering if the black-out would ever be necessary and if my shelters would be put to use.

I went to the office on the following day, to find a letter awaiting me. It was an instruction from Head Office, Singapore, to the effect that I was to report to the Senior Executive Engineer, Kuala Kangsar, in the State of Perak, on the 13th of March.

CHAPTER III

I SUPPOSE THAT my feeling of loneliness, and the depression caused by my sudden transfer from friends in Penang, put me in no mood for the day's events, for I had developed an intense dislike for Kuala Kangsar within half a day of my arrival.

After a journey of two hours in the air-conditioned coach of the F.M.S. Railway I alighted at the small station, and was met by Horsley, my new chief, a small, tough-looking man wearing a soft grey felt hat and white shorts. I had dressed in long white trousers, coat, and tie, as this was my first transfer, and I didn't know exactly what I should wear. We drove off in Horsley's car down a hill to the cross-roads where the Sultan of Perak and residents had erected a granolithic clock-tower to commemorate the Coronation of King George VI, over a slender concrete bridge and up on the other side to Government Hill, once the scene of a bloody battle at the time of the British Colonization, but now a golf course and residential area for Government officers. A typical Government building rose on the right, with terraced lawns and a long, steep flight of steps connecting its main entrance with the road at the bottom of the hill. On the steps were marked the levels and dates of the many disastrous floods which had inundated the town area when the nearby River Perak had been swollen by tropical rains. Horsley told me that the river had risen unchecked before the Chenderoh Dam was built upstream for the Perak Hydro-Electric Company. Stately Royal palms and coconut palms formed an avenue towards the Government officers' quarters. We entered a compound ablaze with colour and trimmed with neat lawns, a pleasant introduction to Horsley's house. This was new, cream-coloured with red-tiled roof, and sat well amongst the palms, the colour and the sunshine. My new chief voiced his objections to the house as we ate the lunch served by a fat, pleasant Chinese boy. The brick walls, he said, gradually heated up until the house was almost untenable by midday, and the glass windows were a modern perpetration which could not compare with the old-style open walls and chick blinds. Moreover, he was a bachelor, and the house was too big, with many small rooms for which he could not imagine anyone having the slightest use. His interest in such problems was explained when I discovered that he had already been planning in his mind a house into which he hoped to retire when he could return to his native Australia. But my problem was to obtain quarters for myself, and I broached the topic rather timidly as we left the house for the office. It appeared that I was replacing an Assistant Engineer who was temporarily transferred to Ipoh to carry out military works, and as he still had all his personal effects in the Assistant Engineer's quarters, Horsley implied that he might not like me to occupy them. What was more, said Horsley, there was no need for me to have been sent to Kuala Kangsar at all, for he was managing quite well on his own. My feeling of depression created by his attitude became even lower when he made me sit opposite to him at his desk all through that sultry afternoon whilst he rang up dozens of people and

interviewed a legion of Tamil clerks and overseers. It was all I could do to choke down my unhappiness and conceal from him the poor, and I later found, unjust, impression which I had formed of the station as a whole and of Horsley in particular.

Horsley's boy came in, bringing with him a slim, smiling Chinese who, by some strange means, had heard of my arrival, and had come thirty miles to apply for the position of cook-boy. Horsley read the testimonials, which I never saw, remarked that they could be purchased cheaply from local petition-writers anyway, and scrutinized the boy carefully. A few words were exchanged in Malay, which language I had only been studying for two months, and then Horsley informed me that I had appointed the lad and was to pay him thirty dollars per month. I was too exhausted, hot, bewildered and demoralized even to murmur a humble word of thanks.

At long last the day ended, in which time a telephone conversation with the Assistant Engineer at Ipoh had fixed up the matter of his quarters, and I entered my new home. It was a wooden building with red roof, standing on stone piers some four feet high. The front wall was louvered to a height of three feet, and the rest was merely expanded metal. It was a single-storey bungalow, and reminded me very strongly of a cricket pavilion. The eaves hung over the walls some three feet, causing the rooms to be rather dark. The house was painted black and white outside, and the whole of the inside was cream. The polished hardwood floor sounded like a drum at every step.

My new cook-boy busied himself about the house, and that evening I had an excellent dinner, in spite of the fact that none of my household goods had arrived. When I prepared for bed I discovered that a mosquito net had been erected, bed linen found, and all spick and span as if I had been in residence for months. I learned that the boy's name was Ah Chang, that he had a wife named Ah Fong, a young daughter, Ah Lin, and a babe in arms as yet unblessed with any name. They were to join him later. That reminded me that I had forgotten my *sais*, Hussein bin Amin, and his young wife, who had followed me from Penang. I inspected the quarters behind the house, and saw with satisfaction that the servants had installed themselves without difficulty, and had borrowed a mat and bolster from my chief's driver. I realized that a great deal could be admired in the ready adaptability of the simple Asiatic to his surroundings, and I pondered on the complications introduced by our standards of civilization as I lay in bed that night.

On the following day the lorry brought my *barang* from the station, and Hussein drove the car from the rail truck, grumbled at the dusty and finger-marked condition in which he found it, and proceeded to give it a cleaning with as much care as a mother with her firstborn.

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Within a week I had met a number of the Europeans in the district, and was introduced to the Club, which the secretary assured me was always empty, but which I must join in order to meet everybody. At that time I felt that I had no desire to meet anyone at all. My new chief

apparently was doing his utmost to assure me of my worthlessness. I had had a touch of dengue fever from the unaccustomed mosquitoes, and I hated Kuala Kangsar and the East with a hatred far more intense than any other emotion I had ever felt. My near-by neighbours ignored me, and I could not speak Malay sufficiently well even to converse with any freedom with my servants. The first people to take pity on me were the local Police Superintendent and his wife, and at dinner one evening they helped me to emerge from my shell and take my place in the diminutive social circle of the district. That night I met the District Officer, a jovial, generous man who was popular with everybody. He proved to be my guide, philosopher of sorts, and friend of no mean order in the days that were to come.

One afternoon when we were able to get away in good time, Horsley took me to the Istana for an hour's tennis. This building, the Sultan's official residence, was modern, and combined Eastern pattern with the latest methods and materials. It stood on the rise of a hill overlooking the River Perak, a huge mass of pink granolithic. Its central and four corner domes were covered with various colours of mosaic tiling, which gave the appearance of speckled gold when shining under the noonday sun. Around the walls were beds of tropical flowers, their vivid reds and yellows making the well-kept lawns look like a brightly-fringed Oriental rug. Palms and gay-blossomed bushes and trees dotted the sward, and the aspect was reminiscent of fairy tales in strange settings, where imagination conjured up visions of sugar-loaf castles and magic carpets. Twice a week the Europeans were the guests of the Sultan of Perak, himself a keen tennis player, and on that day I was introduced to His Highness and to the Rajah di Hilir. The Sultan was most charming, a witty conversationalist, and a good tennis player, and even on the court he had a bearing which emphasized his personality. The Rajah di Hilir was freer in his manner, a great sport, and when he employed his favourite strategy—the lob—the harassed behaviour of his opponent was a source of great amusement to him.

After the game we used to linger a short while, sipping passion fruit juice, and watching the sun going down. The muczzin would call out the stirring Arabic summons to prayer from the Istana's private Mosque, and the cry would be echoed back from the minaret of the Mosque which lay nearby. The sky was unreal, unbelievably beautiful at this time of day. Over to the west, where stood the forest-clad hills and the mysterious building known as the Hermitage, once the residence of an eccentric Rajah, but now in ruins following an unaccountable fire, the sky would be a pale turquoise blue, and as you turned your head the colour would change and deepen until the western skies were the deepest of pure ultramarine. The few wisps of cloud gleamed and shone with silver, pink, and gold, moving with infinite slowness across the sun like fairy feathers. I must have seen this sight two hundred times or more, and never ceased to marvel at the beauty and wonder of it.

By gradual stages I began to feel my feet. It was a painful process, for my nature is retiring, and I still felt myself to be a stranger in a strange land. Then I realized that the few Europeans in the district were simply letting me settle down, watching my habits and finding out my inclina-

tions. I decided to take a practical interest in the garden, and very soon made a habit of gardening every Sunday morning, turning over a bed or planting *kachang bende*, tomatoes, or some kind of bringals.

One morning, as I was turning over a flower-bed, a group of small Tamil boys stood shyly at the entrance to my compound. There was a fruit tree at the corner bearing a type of fruit which is not eaten by Europeans, but which is as popular to Asiatic youngsters as crab-apples are to an English lad, and I could see that they were hoping for a chance to climb up and steal the prize. I reached up and pulled off half a dozen *biji*, distributing them to the delighted children. This action broke down their shy attitude, and in a few minutes we were conversing freely in Malay, the boys squatting near to me, weeding round a bed of flowers.

The ringleader of this circle of new-found friends was a boy of fourteen named Avuly, a bright and intelligent lad with a good knowledge of Malay. We talked about the flowers and vegetables which I was growing, and I discovered that he had a surprising knowledge of gardening. He told me the Tamil names of the various vegetables, and when the small party left that morning we were all on the best of terms.

It became a regular weekly custom to call on me, and I was touched by the innate good-heartedness of the small boys. One brought a handful of tomato shoots, which I planted in a bed along the edge of the house, others gave me bringal shoots, and a tiny curly-haired child one day brought me a *papaya*. I wondered what I could give them in return, and had an idea that they would appreciate English Postage Stamps. I spent an hour one day floating the many stamps from home letters, ranging from a halfpenny to half a crown, and on the following Sunday distributed them amongst the youngsters. They were able to recognize the head of King George VI, and I told them to keep the stamps in an album, so that they could build up a collection from my further gifts.

Avuly was an expert tree-climber, and one day asked me if he could climb my coconut trees and twist off the fruit. I assented with some misgiving, and he stripped and clambered up the tree, gripping the rough trunk with his feet and sliding his hands farther up, then pulling his feet up so that his knees were level with his shoulders, and so on, folding and stretching at an incredible speed. At last he disappeared amongst the fronds, and a nut came crashing to the ground. He probably removed twenty coconuts before coming down, and he refused even to take one for himself. In return I gave Avuly and his friends permission to take the fruit from my mango tree, and every time they called on me after that they used to stand beneath the tree and *punggal*—throw sticks into the branches with surprising accuracy and bring down a shower of fruit.

I joined the Swimming Club at Taiping, and often went along later on Sunday mornings to swim in the cool fresh-water pools formed in the side of a granite hill, and fed continually by a stream which tumbled over the rock face through a cleft in the hill. I was invited to other swimming parties, at Menggle Enchor, where the overflow from the Water Reservoir spilled down a granite slope to a pot-hole in the bottom, and at the Irrigation Dam on the Kenas Road.

At last I made a very big decision: I should have a swimming party of my own, followed by curry tiffin at my bungalow. This was a daring

thing for a bachelor to think of, as the ladies were very competitive and critical when it came to entertaining. I took stock of my home, my tableware, and my supplies of cigarettes and drinks; I pointed out to my boy that all must be of the best—and he smiled, for he had always worked for married couples before, and knew far more about it than I—and I invited the Health Officer and his wife, and the young Police Officer and his wife. On that day I made four good friends. First we went to Taiping, and swam in the cool water there, returning with great appetites for our feast. The curry was prepared by my *sais's* wife on true Malayan lines, with bowls of curried lamb, curried chicken, curried fish, prawns, curried vegetables, and the sambals, salted nuts and dried fish, shredded white onions, shredded fresh coconut, potato crisps, sweet chutney, and sliced banana. The sweet was the usual mould of sago over which was poured coconut milk and *gula Malacca*—a toffee-like syrup extracted from the flower of the palm. After the meal the atmosphere was drowsy, to say the least, and at three o'clock we went our several ways for that Malayan luxury commonly known as a 'lie-off'.

From that day forward I cannot remember feeling lonely, for the initial step had given me confidence, and I enjoyed being host at informal dinner-parties, usually followed by an evening at one or other of the local cinemas. Being a bachelor I was a guest even more often than a host, and soon my leisure hours were fully occupied.

Occasionally, I walked down the hill before dinner for a little exercise, and called at the Club to read the assortment of American and English magazines, or listen to the news in the airy room which served as a ball-room and lounge. The Medical Officer, Dr. Brain, was frequently there, playing billiards with a planter or one of the teachers from the Malay College.

In Kuala Kangsar Club I met an assortment of people with widely divergent views and ways of life, a strangely mixed crowd. But it was easy to define the principal sections of the European population. They were the Government officers and the planters. In no respect were these two types similar, and I often attempted, in my immature and clumsy reasoning, to define the differences between them.

I think the principal difference was caused by the fact that all the Government officers were qualified men and women, who had passed through professional training as doctors or teachers or engineers, civil servants or police. The planters were, for the most part, men who had come to Malaya to learn how to grow and produce and process rubber.

But another fundamental difference was financial. Rubber was at a premium, and the estates were coining money in the biggest boom ever. The planters, who were paid a basic salary plus a bonus based on profits, were 'in the money'. The Government officials, on the other hand, were drawing salaries on a peace-time scale, sufficient for their needs, but not too much with the rising cost of living caused by the War. The planters lived in luxurious bungalows on the estates, whereas the Government men had to take the quarters allocated to them, furnished by Government with 'good, serviceable'—but heavy, dark and uncomfortable furniture.

This difference made itself evident in the Club life. The planters lived lavishly, spent freely, spread themselves whilst they had the money

to do so. The teachers, nurses, doctors, and the P.W.D., with their fixed incomes, were obliged to watch their Club bills. Horsley and I were in the Club one evening when a party of planters came in and invaded the bar, and he turned to the subject of Club life.

"When the slump was on," he said, "the planters were for ever grumbling at the security of the Government officer. Now there's a boom, and we're small fry."

One evening a Club Dance was arranged, and I made my way to the Club at eight o'clock. Every member was asked to provide some food-stuffs, and my boy had been busily engaged on the preparation of *hors-d'œuvres*, which I carried in carefully from my car. A trestle-table was set with plates of caviare, sausage, all manner of small delicacies, biscuits and fruit.

As the members arrived a radiogram played dance records, and I danced with the younger wives of my acquaintances. The group of regular tennis players naturally tended to stick together, and my favourite partners were Ann Burgess, wife of the Health Officer, and herself the Lady Medical Officer, and Eileen Ryves, the wife of Harvey Ryves, junior Police Officer for the District.

At nine o'clock or so we adjourned for supper, sitting at the table or lounging by the bar. The party livened up and many of the men had too much to drink. My party of friends—the District Officer, Ann and Jim Burgess, Eileen and Harvey, and a nursing sister called Alice Rossie—returned to the dancing, leaving the drinkers to their whisky-sodas.

As I danced, I glanced through the open wall of the ball-room and saw a crowd of white-clad, ghostly figures standing along the roadside in the black night. When the record stopped playing I excused myself and walked to the Club entrance to see what was going on.

Twenty or thirty Asiatics, clad in white suits or sarongs, were standing in front of the Club. They were watching us as we drank and danced, laughed and fooled around.

I thought of the men at the bar, of the revelry and the noise, the bright lights and dancing, and I wondered what the Asiatics thought of it all. Pretty comic we must have looked, like marionettes performing for their amusement as they stood silently by the roadside.

All that evening, from nine o'clock until two in the morning, we were watched. Watched, I felt, by dark eyes whose expressionless gaze gave no clue to the thoughts of their owners. Yet their very silence, their stillness, made me imagine them to be thinking 'Look at the White Men'.

It was the same every time a dance was held. The other members ignored the watchers, but I was a new-comer, and my imagination was strong.

At one affair, a member, having his fling whilst his wife was at home, began to drink heavily, and was soon out of control. He became aggressive and made himself unpleasant when a guest—a visitor named Eileen Tray—refused to dance with him. A most uncomfortable atmosphere was created, until at length she agreed to dance. They had not been dancing a minute when he crashed his partner against a chair by the wall and fell to the floor. Eileen tried to pass it off, but he had made a fool

of both of them and the party gradually broke up. Even the District Officer lost his customary smile, and we left the offender to drink alone.

And the Asiatics were lining the road, watching the show.

But as time passed, and my confidence grew, I was able to pick my friends. It was natural that I should prefer the company of young people, and those who enjoyed a game of tennis or a morning's swimming. After an evening's tennis a small party would sit in Jim Burgess's bungalow, cooling off and enjoying a drink and discussion. Our conversation was almost always about our work, and I soon came to realize that one's work is one's life out there. The reason, I believe, is that the Britisher never makes the East his home; he has gone there to work, and work takes all his daylight hours, fills his life between leaves. There is no family life, for the children must go to England or Australia when they are seven or eight years of age, and their parents, whom they meet once in three years thereafter, are merely the people who pay the bills for school and clothes.

I am not sure that that was a good thing. I often discussed the matter with my neighbours, and my subsequent experiences have led me to believe that perhaps we should have been more successful if we had taken Malaya to be our home. Perhaps then there would have been a different background to our relations with the Asiatics. Perhaps, if we had regarded Malaya as our own personal country, and all Malayan's of whatsoever race or creed, as our fellow-patriots, then, perhaps, we might have been justified in expecting the loyalty which we wished for in December, 1942.

CHAPTER IV

MY INTEREST IN the district grew as I travelled about and came to know it better. For variety and beauty and health Kuala Kangsar was acknowledged as one of the finest districts in Malaya. Within its boundary were wild boar, elephants, tigers, and snakes for the hunter; Sakais, the last remaining aboriginals, who lived in the inner forests and still hunted with blowpipes; and the true Malays, from whom one learned the language in its fuller and richer form, not the corrupted and Anglicized jargon of Penang or Singapore.

The pride of the district was the small island of Pangkor, lying to the south-west at the mouth of the River Dindings. This was the reader's dream of a tropical island, with silver sands and palms standing on the beaches, a native village, and small boats lying off the rough wooden jetty, where mackerel were spread to dry in the sun. Three or four European week-end bungalows were on the far side of the island, and a wooden Rest House provided by the Government for the visitors. From the house the guest could run down the beach to swim in the warm green sea, or lie beneath the palms on a moonlit night watching the dancing phosphorescence and the clear white light flashing from the ripples. There was an emerald bay, too, its clear still waters alive with

fish which came readily to the hook of the drowsy Malay as he allowed his *sampan* to drift silently in the quiet waters.

Meanwhile I had become thoroughly accustomed to the work of the district and had befriended the overseers and clerks, who were Indian, Chinese, and Eurasians. My chief did not, I think, approve very much of my attitude towards the Asiatic staff. He held firm to a policy of hard discipline, and was not interested in the point of view of the individuals so much as in getting the job done. His attitude was that of a man with many years' service amongst rogues and shirkers, whereas I was an outsider, fresh from a country where a workman could use his own judgment in most matters. Gradually I found that Horsley was allowing me to work unhindered, however, and as a result I drew closer towards the men working for me. I found that the educated Asiatic or Eurasian liked to feel that same personal touch which means so much to an Englishman, and I was pleased to find that sometimes one of my staff would talk of his personal affairs as he rode with me in my car to inspect a job or called at my house with a message.

Two Eurasian technical assistants, and a Malay coolie, left impressions on my mind which will never, I feel, be completely erased by time. They were William Brawn, the son of a German father and Chinese mother, Robert Partridge, whose father was an ex-Indian Army soldier and mother a Tamil; and Zakariah, a Malay of doubtful lineage.

William Brawn took up duties as Workshop Foreman in the District two days before my arrival. Horsley had transformed a few ramshackle sheds and a dump into a respectable yard, straightened out the workshop, and obtained permission for the appointment of a properly qualified mechanic to attend to the fifteen lorries and twelve road-rollers, concrete-mixers and other plant which are a necessary part of the equipment for a large district. In the past a few fitters of dubious qualities had tinkered with the plant under the general supervision of a Tamil technical assistant named Chelliah, whose training had been in roadworks and buildings.

I witnessed the period of handing over from Chelliah to Brawn, and it was obvious to me that sooner or later a clash was bound to occur between these two men. Chelliah was the type of man who was happiest when he had a feeling of power and authority; he was honest and hard-working, but he held an overestimated opinion of his own importance. That was, I suppose, excusable, for he was a fine figure of Tamil manhood, standing six feet, black as coal, with large soft eyes and beautiful teeth. He controlled a labour force of some four hundred men. Brawn was as white as any European, about five-feet-nine, and as thin as a taper. Chelliah was of high caste, a true Hindu and vegetarian; Brawn was a *sa-tengah* of doubtful lineage and no religion. Blood, as much as jealousy, was responsible for Chelliah's attitude.

It was unfortunate that Horsley omitted to make clear to Chelliah that the running of the workshop was no longer in his hands, for the latter attempted to exercise his authority over the new foreman. After a few days I saw the trouble and asked Brawn about it. He said that his

position in relation to Chelliah had not been defined and he did not wish to have any interference with his work. I agreed privately, and spoke to my chief. Brawn was, however, on probation only, and was undergoing the hard criticism which I had luckily survived; Horsley wanted to wait and see how the workshop improved. Brawn had many confidential talks with me, and I could see that he was very upset. Chelliah, on the other hand, was taking advantage of his long standing to influence the chief's mind against the man who threatened his authority. Whenever a lorry broke down Chelliah reported it in great detail with hints of faulty workmanship. An accident to a lorry on a trial run following overhaul gave Chelliah an opportunity to strengthen his position, and made me fear that Brawn might face dismissal. The engine broke down and had to be stripped for inspection. It was found that a connecting-rod had come loose and had pushed clean through the piston side and the cylinder wall. Brawn explained that he had been at lunch when that particular piston was fitted, and had not examined it. I warned him that it was a serious offence, and the man was almost in tears. Chelliah, naturally, was delighted. However, I was able to persuade Horsley to give Brawn another chance, realizing also that my own reputation was involved should further trouble occur.

I risked being badly let down by taking Brawn into my confidence, but I felt that I knew him well enough to experiment. Pointing out my own rather precarious position, I told him of Chelliah's treachery, and made him promise not to take any action or to provoke the man. To Horsley I dropped occasional words of praise on Brawn's efficiency, of which I was in no doubt, and at last I felt that the time was ripe to obtain a clear ruling on Brawn's position. A list of foreman's duties was drafted and Chelliah and Brawn were given copies.

Brawn was overjoyed. He brightened up noticeably, and it was gratifying to observe the more confident manner in which he addressed Horsley when the latter inspected the workshop. Soon this had its effect on the chief, who softened his attitude and actually indicated his appreciation of Brawn's good work by many a chance word. Chelliah took the transfer of duties as a personal affront, and my next task was to convince him that he was wrong. It was necessary to be hard with him at times, until at last he saw that innuendoes against other staff were undesirable. But I never really solved the problem of Chelliah, and we were to have more trouble from him later.

June was upon us before the workshop had got into its stride under the new organization, and the Japanese were becoming a source of worry. Our Civil Defence work increased, and the workshop was called upon to do a great deal of work. As the threat of war came nearer, Government offices prepared their Emergency Organization Schemes. Horsley and I worked out a comprehensive scheme for road repairs, bridge repairs, demolition and rescue works. The workshop was a vital factor, for transport and repairs were essential. Brawn co-operated splendidly, and when the full scheme was posted up he showed a keen interest. He confessed to me that he had applied for another job a week after he came to Kuala Kangsar. "If you hadn't been patient with me when all the trouble was on, I shouldn't have stayed," he said. "I'm staying

now, sir; but when you go, I'm going too. If there's anything you ever want me to do for you, and you can trust me, I'll do it. I've never had many friends—because I was brought up in a Home, and out here a Eurasian is neither one thing nor another. But I want you to accept my friendship, and call on me whenever you feel you need me." I ordered Hussein to start the car, to cover my embarrassment; Brawn's confidence was heartening to me.

I needed his loyalty later, as you will come to know.

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Within a few days of my taking up duties in Kuala Kangsar, I had occasion to visit Sungei Siput, on the eastern side of my district. The Overseer in charge of this small section was Robert Partridge, a lad of twenty-four, but recently passed out of technical training. He was of medium build, with a dark skin, black-haired with a thin moustache, and large soft eyes with long lashes, very handsome and rather the type that would excite the imagination of the average flapper if he were on the stage or screen. As he was only a trifle younger than myself, I sympathized with the enthusiasm which he showed in his work, and encouraged him to seek my advice on points of construction and policy. Soon he lost his initial reticence, and I found that he wanted to marry a pretty Eurasian girl, but could not as he only received eighty dollars a month *gaji*. He explained that Eurasians have to eat and live like Europeans, but only get the salaries of Asiatics. Partridge, a thoughtful lad who read a little, was very worried about what he called 'The Problem of the Eurasian'. In his circle of friends were a number of lovely girls who literally 'ran around' after any European who was susceptible. The Eurasian, for the most part, tries to forget his lineage, apes the European, and considers it a triumph if he or she can marry a white. The white man who is not so white as he is painted, and who appreciates the dark eyes and full figure of the *sa-tengah* girl, plays on this to his benefit and for his entertainment; and when he has done with the girl's body he discards it. In Penang and Singapore you can dance with the most beautiful Eurasian girls you could wish for, with seductive figures and eyes and lips that speak even more than words. It costs you twenty-five cents a dance, which is sevenpence. Most of the girls are prostitutes, and in the majority of cases their loss of self-respect can be traced to the lust in the eyes of a European.

Small wonder that Partridge was worried. He wanted to marry the girl before she was noticed by another man.

The opportunity for Partridge to prove his worth came at Grik, most northerly section of my district, following the death of an overseer. The section is remote from Kuala Kangsar, full seventy miles away, and required a man who could be trusted to work hard and to keep honest. I chose Partridge, and he was overjoyed at the chance given to him to make good.

On my fortnightly inspections Partridge would meet me in Lenggong and come with me in my car; we had many talks on private matters whilst travelling from job to job, and I found that he was able to save

money in Grik better than in Sungei Siput. He asked me if he should take the chance and marry. I said, "Yes, certainly," and gave him a day off to buy the ring. He went to Ipoh, but discovered that he did not know the size required, and must wait until he could hear from the girl, who lived in Malacca.

I have often wondered since if he ever bought the ring.

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I was inspecting the work being carried out by a road gang one day when I noticed a coolie idling by the roadside. He was picking and scratching at the pile of stones with his *changkol*, scooping the road metal into the shallow basket at his feet, and taking two or three times as long as his fellows.

"Who's that man?" I asked the Sub-overseer.

The Tamil laughed. "Oh, he's Zakariah, sir; he's a little soft in the head."

"Better tell him to get a move on; he's a bad effect on the others," I suggested, and the matter was left at that.

A few evenings later, as I was lounging in my chair after tea, I heard a scuffling noise in the drive, and a nervous voice calling, "*Tuan, tuan.*" I went to the door, wondering who it was disturbing me at that time.

Zakariah stood at the foot of the steps, nervously clasping and unclasping his hands. He saluted, tipping his black velvet *songkok* lightly, and I asked him what he wanted.

"The work, *tuan*, it is very hard. Perhaps the *tuan* will find me something easy." He clasped his hands, cracking the knuckles, then pulled on his fingers, so that the joints crunched like bits of dried stick being trodden underfoot. I cringed, for I have always had a dislike of this habit.

"*Baik*, to-morrow I shall speak to the Head Overseers," I promised, and Zakariah departed.

On the following day I sent for Zakariah's record card, and its data so surprised me that I opened up a series of inquiries to obtain information on the coolie.

In the section describing the man's race, I found the words, 'Chinese turned Mohammedan'. Chinese! He wore the sarong and *songkok* of a Malay, spoke as a Malay, and looked like a Malay.

Chelliah was able to throw a little light on the matter, I found. Zakariah was something of a sensation in his way. Many times the coolies had been surprised to see the car belonging to the Sultan or one of the Royal Household draw up, and Zakariah drop his *changkol* to talk to the prince. Many stories went around about the reasons for the Royal patronage, and I learned that Zakariah lived in a dwelling on the edge of the Istana grounds. It was believed that he was half Malay, half Chinese.

When I told Chelliah of Zakariah's visit to my quarters on the previous evening, the overseer laughed, and said: "Always he is like that; he complains of a weak neck, and says he cannot carry the basket on his head."

When I mentioned the strange case to Horsley, my chief smiled. "Oh, old Zakariah," he said; "yes, he's well-known. Better try to find him a light job. We set him on at the Sultan's request."

"The Sultan's request?" I echoed incredulously. "Why should he interest himself in a coolie?"

"It pays not to ask too much," my chief advised. "Just find him something easier, that's all."

I transferred Zakariah to a lorry-loading gang, so that most of his time would be spent riding on the lorry, and only when loading or emptying would he be working. I thought then that I could forget him.

But only a week had passed when the coolie caused a scene at a quarry. I was talking to the crusher driver when I noticed a scuffling amongst a gang of coolies near a lorry. From the midst of the group came Zakariah. He shuffled over to me with his strange ambling, half-hopping, splay-footed gait, and saluted nervously, then stood cracking and crunching his long fingers, his body shaking as he stood before me.

"What's wrong, Zakariah?" I asked him, rather irritated that one coolie could cause so much disturbance.

"The work, *tuan*, it is too hard," he explained. "When I carry on my head, it is weak here," and he lowered his head and half-turned to show me the back of his neck.

The other coolies were standing watching the show, amused at the poor half-wit's exhibition. I told him to go back to his work and I would see what I could arrange with Chelliah.

The Head Overseer had only one alternative to offer the coolie. Zakariah could work as cleaner on a small lorry which we used for carrying stores about the town.

I instructed Chelliah to effect the transfer and forgot the troublesome coolie again.

A few mornings later I was speaking to Brawn in the workshop yard when I noticed the small lorry under a shed. On my inquiry, Brawn explained that it had just changed a tyre, and I walked over to the vehicle.

From behind the lorry came Zakariah, and he saluted with a smart "*Tabek, tuan*," his face lighting up in a broad grin. I returned his greeting and turned away to talk to Brawn. Zakariah, however, was determined to demonstrate his efficiency in his new appointment, for he fussed around, filling the radiator, pumping the tyres, making a great show of his work. I could not withhold a smile, though I had turned my back on the coolie, and Brawn laughed.

"Old Zakariah seems to like his new job," he said.

And 'Old Zakariah' stuck to his job; in fact, he was the last man to work for the P.W.D. in Kuala Kangsar.

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The clouds of war were deepening, and Indian and Gurkha troops poured into the country. Convoys of lorries wound along the roads, and the inexperienced drivers came to grief on many occasions in the deep roadside ditches, on the sharper bends, and at the narrow bridges.

The Main Trunk Road was only eighteen feet wide for the most part, and proved inadequate for the heavy and bulky traffic. We had to construct loop turning-points along the important routes and a number of diversion roads were made, cutting through semi-jungle to by-pass important bridges which might be bombed.

In July the Vichy Government of France agreed to the occupation by the Japanese of vital strategic parts of French Indo-China.

Officers of the 2nd and 9th Gurkha Regiments made inspections of the aerodrome at Sitiawan, and I had to trudge round in the spiky grass sitting pill-boxes and gun-pits and barbed wire for the defence of the area.

Australians invaded the country by the thousands, and intensive training in the semi-jungle began almost as soon as they reached Malaya. The European clubs became centres of hospitality for the A.I.F., and the women thronged round the new arrivals, entertaining, treating, admiring, whilst their husbands put in another two months' camp with the Volunteers, the second within the year.

I had my Medical at Taiping, and was awaiting call-up, but a week before the camp was to begin, Headquarters informed me that I was reserved until 31st December owing to the nature of my duties.

Whilst returning from an inspection in the Grik area one day I met a long convoy of lorries laden with Indian and Gurkha troops heading north towards the Thai border.

Camps were being thrown up in the rubber estates and it seemed as if the country was alive with troops.

I had to rush on with the construction of air-raid shelters, blast-protection to essential buildings, and elaborate schemes of black-out for hospitals. Practice brown-outs and black-outs were held, and I turned my thoughts to the days of 1939 when the same process of change had preceded the outbreak of war over England.

And in Malaya, as in England, A.R.P. was a bit of a joke, a new game. A middle-aged man fussed around our town concocting weird and wonderful schemes of organization. A wealthy Asiatic gentleman presented a mobile canteen to the District, and this was the subject of a formal, pompous ceremony outside the Court House.

An A.R.P. exercise was held, but it was a fiasco. My part was the rescue and demolition organization, and a fake burst in a water main provided the test for a repair gang. The local population stood watching this new form of free entertainment as the P.W.D. lorries rushed up and discharged their cargoes of men and tools, and flares were lit at the working spot. A pile of rotten wood and straw was set ablaze, and the new auxiliary fire-engine dashed to the scene, to find its way blocked by an excited crowd. Eventually a way was cleared and the engine got to work. Unfortunately it broke down, and the fire burned itself out. Asiatics were rushing everywhere flashing torches and fussing among the spectators. I asked the A.R.P. Controller if he had special duties outlined for these men, and he hadn't. His idea of a warden was to keep the traffic in order, stopping cars to check their lamps, or clearing the streets.

I returned home that night in a very worried frame of mind, for I

had seen A.R.P. in its infancy in England—watched it grow from nobody's baby to a vital service. I had seen the sterling work of the Civil Defence personnel in the London blitz and knew the risks and dangers of careless or inefficient organization.

The problem was, of course, different in Malaya. The Asiatic is emotional, easily shaken, and panics readily. He could not be expected to be able to visualize war in its modern, European form. That is where we should have put more energy and interest—in training, not only the Civil Defence Workers, but the general public, to be ready for bombs and fire.

All Government offices were supplied with stirrup-pumps, and Brawn made fire-buckets, sand-bins, and scoops at the P.W.D. workshop. I decided that, however little was done elsewhere, my own men at least were going to have as good a training as I knew how to give them. Imitation incendiary bombs were made from dry coconut husks soaked in kerosene, filled with bitumen and sugar and salt. A practice was held outside the office one afternoon, the 'bombs' being lit and thrown on to the parking area clear of buildings. For over an hour I grovelled on the ground, demonstrating the use of the stirrup-pump and switching the teams so that each man took his turn with the jet, the pump, and the water-carrying. We were all dirty, wet, and very hot when the exercise was over, but I felt that we had achieved a little. Short talks were given on fire-fighting methods, on the duties of fire-watchers, and on the Department's system of repairs, rescue, and demolition. I knew I was going beyond the scope of my duties, as an A.R.P. organization was supposed to exist, but its leaders were obviously at a loss as to how to start their work, and had no idea of the importance of training.

But then the idea of war in Malaya seemed so far away. Although the troops were there, and there were all the outward signs of preparation, few thought that the Japanese would strike. "They're afraid of America"; "They've too much on with China"; "We're too strongly defended", were typical observations at the Club.

In this Fools' Paradise life went on very sweetly in Kuala Kangsar. The Sultan's birthday was celebrated with the same pomp and ceremony as in peace time, the two mosques being floodlit by means of coloured lights, and all the paths and approach roads to the Istana were edged with tiny flickering wick-lamps on bamboo poles. It was my duty to design the decoration, and I spent a pleasant evening setting the large flood lamps with the electrical contractor, changing the colour slides to my fancy until I was satisfied. The effect as one drove up to the Central Mosque was as if a pink and blue castle was floating in the sky, changing colour as the bends in the approach road showed different sides of the Mosque. Very beautiful, very entertaining, and very far from war. It was the 14th of November, 1941.

Of course we knew it was going to happen, bound to happen. But nobody dared to conjecture when, or how, the Japanese would strike.

The local Japanese were under constant watch, day and night, for weeks before war broke out. I often wonder if the boast of a photographer named Suzuki ever came true. Speaking to the Police Superintendent declared: "I shall be leaving Kuala Kangsar soon, and when I return

I shall be District Officer." Then he disappeared; probably it was he who led his countrymen through from Thailand into my district, for he was a keen Rambler and knew all the jungle paths.

The news reported that a convoy was seen sailing up the Gulf of Siam; the Volunteers were mobilized; urgent messages came through for us to commence the defence works at Sitiawan, and Horsley went down, leaving me in charge of the District.

On the 8th of December the Japanese bombed Singapore, and the face of Malaya changed overnight.

CHAPTER V

MY FIRST NEWS of the war came at 4.15 on the morning of the 8th, when the telephone shook me from my sleep. A young lieutenant of the Perak Volunteers was speaking from Sitiawan Aerodrome. "The balloon's gone up," said he, "and I propose to take over the Field for Defence." His news, half-expected though it was, made me realize fully, for the first time, the responsibilities of my position. I dressed, not quite sure why I did it. But I couldn't in all fairness get into my bed again whilst the war was all nice and new, and thousands of other fellows were at work already. I decided that I ought to attend muster of my coolies, and was relieved to find that none of the overseers or men knew the ominous news.

I attended muster every morning after that, coming back to shave and eat at 5.30 or 6 a.m. I was anxious to maintain close contact with all my men, as the slightest scare would panic the lot of them. And everything went well for ten days.

My precious Civil Defence Scheme was put into force, and I was able to operate a rota for shifts which had taken me many nights at home to devise, nights spent in arranging provision for times of prayer for the Mohammedans, different times for the meals of Tamils, Malays, and Chinese, and one whole day per week free. Equal shares of day and night shifts had to be given to every man. Oh, yes, I was very proud of that rota. Strangely enough, even that worked for ten days too.

We had to rush to finish off military works and shelters, main roads that were under repair, and other jobs which might hinder the military. A steady stream of traffic headed north towards Grik, and guns and troops rumbled along the road between Ipoh and Taiping. The first of the evacuees came in from Kedah.

After dinner on the evening of the 17th of December, feeling the need for a change and a little company, I went to the Club. I entered the lounge, expecting to see two or three members reading the magazines, but the room was crowded. A number of Press war correspondents were discussing the turn of events with the District Officer, and telling of their experiences. A gloomy trio of middle-aged men were standing beneath a heavily-shaded lamp, talking in low voices. A nursing sister and a

teacher were sitting on a divan, and they hailed me as I made my way towards them.

"What about a dance?" I suggested, and turned to the radiogram. There was no reply, and I looked at the District Officer, but he had not heard me.

"Anything wrong?" I inquired.

Dick Prior, one of the middle-aged trio, replied:

"Haven't you heard?" he asked; "they've sunk the *Prince of Wales* and *Repulse*."

I remember the cold sensation to my face as the blood left my cheeks, to be followed almost instantly by a burning flush which seemed to dry my very eyes. I looked at the crowd, all talking in low voices in the dimly-lit room, as if a corpse were laid in state near by. A faint exclamation was all my mouth could utter at the moment; I lit a cigarette, and, feeling strangely weary, sought a chair.

"What do you think will happen now?" asked one of the girls nervously.

"Happen?" I echoed; "what do you mean?"

"Well, they were the only big ships we had here," she replied. "The Japs can land anywhere now."

I laughed, reassured her, and said that the war was only three days old. Anything could happen.

With a rueful smile I looked again at the sorry figures in the room. This was not my idea of the change and the company I should have had when I came down to the Club. I tried to enter into normal conversation, but there was no response.

At last I could stand it no longer. I went to the radiogram and selected a record. The quickstep sounded artificial and empty in that atmosphere, but one of the girls laughed at the impertinence of it, and her friend started talking.

"I say, let's dance," I suggested in an undertone, and my partner rose unwillingly. Dancing was difficult owing to the darkened room and the groups of men on the floor, but we navigated the route fairly successfully and felt much better for the effort.

The record stopped, and I changed it for a waltz. I raised inquiring eyebrows to my partner standing near by, but she seemed dubious.

"Do you think we ought to dance?" she queried, "when the news is so bad?"

"Of course we should," I laughed. "Heavens! What can *we* do about it?"

But as we were making a circuit of a gloomy group one of the men spoke up, with a voice full of emotion, loud above the sound of the music.

"My God, how you can dance on an occasion like this defeats me," he said.

The other girl snapped off the radiogram. All eyes turned on the speaker and me. I felt the colour rise, and I forgot that I was a mere boy compared to the others present. I told them that we in England had lost the *Courageous*, the *Royal Oak*, the *Empress of Britain*, and scores of others; we had lost France, suffered Dunkirk, had nothing every day

but bad news, bad news, and more bad news, for two years. And on the third day of the war here, we were losing heart.

When I had finished I was breathless and hot, and I crossed to the radiogram and put on a record.

"Please, please dance," I urged my partner, and she agreed. As we moved around the room I sorted my thoughts, ignoring the others there, and my emotion left me. I discovered that my partner was looking at me, so I conjured a smile, and she smiled back at me.

"They deserved it," she whispered, and I felt better.

We put on record after record, and old Dick Prior offered me a cigar. Another man asked the second girl to dance, and a young married couple came into the Club and joined us. The atmosphere brightened a little, and we went home about midnight in better spirits.

On the following Saturday a Brewster Buffalo made a forced landing, and the twenty-year-old pilot, an Australian named O'Mara, was my guest for the night. He had been sent to Penang to engage the Japanese who were bombing the island, and he claimed four machines before he ran into a large escort of fighters. With admirable frankness he told me that he had lost his head, and the aircraft turned over. When he righted her he made for his base in Ipoh, but lost his direction and made the landing. Early next morning a small gang of coolies was very proud to clear away the goal posts from the Polo Ground where he had sat down, and a large crowd watched him take off as the morning mists evaporated under the rising sun. That was the only aircraft I saw over Kuala Kangsar.

Horsley returned from Sitiawan Aerodrome for a night's rest in his own bed. He was very low in spirits and inclined to pessimism.

"What do you think of it, bo'?" he asked me.

"Oh, you can't tell yet," I replied. "They've walked through Thailand, but we have troops on the Thai border."

He seemed to reflect a little, and did not continue the discussion; it was true; the fight was but a week old. Perhaps the situation would be stabilized. Certainly troops were passing constantly through the town and up the Grik Road.

Horsley stayed in Kuala Kangsar for two or three days only, for at three o'clock one morning my telephone rang, and I jumped out of bed to answer its shrill summons. The State Engineer was on the other end.

"Bailey, can you tell me if Horsley's at home?" he asked.

"Yes; can't you make him hear?"

"No; he must be a hell of a sound sleeper, for I've been ringing for half an hour. I'm afraid I'll have to ask you to dress and go along there."

I took the message. We were to evacuate all vehicles of every description from the coast to a village thirty miles inland.

As I walked round to Horsley's quarters in the cold night air the significance of the order took shape in the flurry of thoughts and fears which occupied my mind. The coastal area of our district included Lumut and Sitiawan, and a single road was the only means of communication with the rest of the country. To remove all cars, vans, lorries, motor-cycles, etc., was to isolate the whole coastal region. No food, fuel,

services could reach the coastal towns by road unless carried on foot for thirty miles. The towns, villages, and estates would be sterilized.

I reached the house and hammered on the glass-panelled door with my closed fists. After a few moments I could hear footsteps pattering downstairs, and my chief opened the door.

"Good God, I thought the noise was machine-guns," Horsley grumbled. He looked weary, and I felt sorry to have to disturb his much-needed sleep.

"Sorry, but the State Engineer said I'd to waken you and give you this message." I passed on the instruction, Horsley gasped, and a low exclamation of dismay came involuntarily from his lips.

"I can't do it," he said at last; "they can't realize what it means."

He invited me in, and we discussed the drastic steps he had been told to take. He decided to ring the State Engineer again to make sure that the order was understood.

There was no mistake. Every vehicle that might be used as transport was to be deployed to a position outside the limit of the coastal area. No vehicle was to be allowed to return.

"I'll do it, but it means disaster," he said.

Horsley left on the following morning for Sitiawan, leaving me once more to run the District whilst he carried out his terrible task.

On the 14th December Robert Partridge came to see me. He had been given half an hour's notice to clear out of his home in Grik, owing to the rapid advance of the Japanese, and had left as he was, not even bringing a change of clothes. In his anxiety to do his duty he had used up his precious half-hour in seeking his labour force. All had run into the jungle, leaving a young sub-overseer only. These two boys reported to me for instructions. Partridge was heartbroken, and I knew the reason why, he had lost his savings, his few possessions, and would not be able to marry. I was too upset to say much to him, but I gave him three lorries and told him to go as far up the Grik Road as the Military would allow, pick up the remnants of the Labour Force and settle them in the Coolie Lines nearer Kuala Kangsar. On the next day I sent up a heavy lorry filled with rice, and wages for a few of the men who had missed payment at pay-day. The lorry never returned.

Horsley rang up from Sitiawan Aerodrome to ask for all the gelignite I could give him from the Store. He had received instructions to blow up the aerodrome and its defences—including the work he had been doing but a few days before.

My men in Kuala Kangsar were calm, and when a party of engineers under Major Wakeham met me on 15th December I was thankful that I could rely on them.

Major Wakeham had instructions to prepare the bridges of my District for demolition. These included the Iskandar Bridge, built in 1929, a big job of arched girder construction, crossing the River Perak, Victoria Railway Bridge, which was an equally large bridge half a mile upstream, and the Blanja Pontoon Bridge, crossing the same wide river by means of floating steel cylinder pontoons on the Batu-Gajah-Taiping loop road. He had a handful of Asiatic Volunteers, and no materials except explosives. We fixed up shifts to ensure twenty-four-hour working of both

labour and lorries, and then began the most intensive rush I have so far experienced. They wanted timber and nails, wire, buckets, string, electric batteries, cable, petrol, lorries, and coolies, an office, God knows what. Wakeham would ring up in his casual way and ask in his quiet voice for something, which probably I could have got in a few days in peace time if he had signed a requisition, but which he wanted in an hour without requisition or even money. I just had to get it, and there was no argument. I threw caution to the winds, walked into a sawmill one day and took it over, as well as the wood which I had to have cut down, and hoped that soon I should have some money with which to pay. Petrol was issued from the jealously-guarded pump in the workshop yard, and I had one anxious day when we had about twenty gallons left to fill up probably twenty lorries, and the supply lorry which I had ordered without order or funds was held up by an air raid in Ipoh. But it came, and that was the only occasion when I should have had courage to admit that I nearly fainted with sheer relief. Then at last Colonel Lloyd, Wakeham's superior officer, gave me one thousand dollars hard cash, and on the next day ten thousand dollars followed it. The chief clerk, a Tamil of the Special Grade Clerical Service, and as full of routine and red tape as any Government Officer, recited General Orders to me, according to which I was only allowed two hundred dollars in the safe at any time. I knew the rules, but he didn't see my point, so that he refused to hold the key to the second lock. I had to keep both keys, and I had visions of a gang breaking into the wooden P.W.D. Office and removing the money. I worked out how long it would take me to pay back should it be lost.

The Chinese shopkeepers in the town shut their doors, and my coolies ran out of rice. Almost every time I inspected a job one or more of the men asked me to get them this staple food. At all events these faithful, splendid little Tamils must be kept at the demolitions until they were completed. I was at my wits' end as to how to provide the rice, and so decided to ask the District Officer to help me.

The D.O., still his cheery self, heard my story with sympathy and reassured me in his fatherly, kindly way. After making a number of calls on the telephone he finally informed me that I could send a lorry to pick up four bags of rice.

In the afternoon the small lorry reported at the P.W.D. Office. Four bags filled the back, and there, mounting guard over them, looking very important, was the foolish, weakly, shambling lorry cleaner, Zakariah.

I got in beside the driver and we went along to the main coolie lines near the workshop. I told Zakariah to call the coolies, and he scuttered off in his flapping plumsoles, holding his long sarong at knee-height, and shouting summonses as he passed down the lines.

The inhabitants of Kuala Kangsar witnessed the unusual sight of a young European sitting on a sack of rice on the back of a lorry, filling coolies' bags and hats and newspapers with rice carefully measured with a *chupak* measure to make it spin out, and Zakariah fussing round, trimming the ranks, calling for silence, pushing the coolies forward one by one to receive their rations. He, Zakariah, was an important man that day, for was not the *tuan* sitting in his lorry?

The Engineers received instructions to blow up or immobilize Chenderoh Dam, and one morning I had to go up the Grnk Road to the 50th mile to see the Captain of the small unit sent for that purpose. The Japs had already come down to within a mile of Lenggong, and a Japanese reconnaissance plane flew overhead without opposition to see what we were doing. Mercifully we were well covered by rubber and jungle trees. The Engineers had had no sleep for four days, and had been living on *pomeloes*, a large fruit like a grape-fruit. That morning they had caught a stray goat and were going to have a feast.

Well, we finished the job, and Wakeham had high praise for the coolies who had worked like slaves to do it. On the 18th of December the Public Works Department, Kuala Kangsar, having stripped itself bare of materials and completed the preparation for the destruction of its best engineering works, packed up shop and ceased to exist. My own work finished at seven o'clock in the evening and I returned home.

I had barely had dinner when an architect from Taiping P.W.D. came up the drive in his Riley. He was exhausted, hungry, nerve-wracked, and he asked to be put up for the night. With him were his *sais* and boy, who had to be fed and accommodated. They had got out of Taiping in a convoy, and although I did not then fully appreciate the strain and difficulty of such a journey, I was to realize it in the near future. I had little food in the house, for my Taiping suppliers had not delivered that week, and local shops were mostly closed. However, I had plenty of drink in stock, and we scratched a meal together.

At nine o'clock we had another guest; he was an engineer from Kedah who had brought a convoy of six lorries from Taiping. They had been machine-gunned, the lorries had been giving trouble, and the whole inner tube and tyre on a back wheel of his own car had been torn to shreds. His immediate wish was for a beer and a cigarette. The meal we gave him was very nondescript indeed, and when I discovered that he had a Chinese girl in his car who also required food and a pallet, I was at my wits' end.

Ah Chang, who had sent his wife and children into the forest, was showing signs of distress. For four days my own irregularity at meal-times, my midnight calls, the unexpected extra guests for a hasty meal or drink or bath, and the great tension, had been having their effect on him. Now his face was drawn and very pale, and he gave a despairing gesture at each new order or tax on his ability. But he never let me down. He fed and slept the Asiatics in the servants' quarters and scraped food together for us; he rigged up beds and kept us going with everything we desired, until at midnight he just had to give in. Before he went to bed I looked in at his kitchen. He and Hussein, my *sais*, had just about one pound of rice left—they had been giving it to the others. That was too much for me. I remembered that I had left part of one bag of rice at the workshop after distribution, and I decided to let them have it.

I rang up the workshop, and my heart swelled at the sound of Brawn's voice, for he had been at work since seven that morning. My orders were for him to refuel, grease round, tune up and test the six Taiping lorries at once, unload all redundant supplies, and load up with all valuable

materials from the workshop. He had also to find a tyre and tube for the damaged car. The lorries and car would be leaving at six o'clock on the following morning. I expected protests, for admittedly my orders were unreasonable, but Brawn replied: "Very good, sir; I shall stay on the job until it's done". I felt proud, triumphantly proud, as I hung up the receiver, for loyalty such as that was far beyond a man's duty, and had been won by me for myself alone.

I had mentioned the rice to Brawn, and he came round with it strapped on the carrier of his old Ford Eight. We divided it between the servants, and Brawn and I had a very warm chat behind the house. He asked for permission to evacuate as soon as his job was done, and I gave it on condition that he made contact with the nearest P.W.D. Office for duties. This he promised.

I was to have other callers that night. Shortly after Brawn left, Robert Partridge and a young Indian draughtsman named Nathaniel asked to speak to me. I was unaccountably unwilling to see them, possibly because Partridge had confided so much in me in the past, and no man enjoys the sight of a friend on the verge of tears; or perhaps because I knew that they were coming to me for advice, which I felt I was too young and immature to give. However, they were my men, as well as my friends, and it was my duty to help them.

Both men, even younger than I, were in a pitiful state of emotion. They asked for instructions, as they said that the Office Staff had gone, and most of the Labour force and overseers with them. This was a blow to me, for there had been no signs of panic in the town that day. I asked Partridge what he intended to do, knowing the answer before he gave it. Of course he wanted to go to Malacca, where he could look after the girl he had hoped to marry. Nathaniel wanted to strike southwards too, for his parents were there.

In the ordinary way I had no powers to allow them to leave the District, but their work was finished. I gave them my permission, on condition that they reported to the first P.W.D. Office possible. They took my hands. Our farewell may have been unusual, but it was quite excusable. Asiatics are very emotional, and Partridge was half Asiatic, and his experiences had told heavily on his powers of resistance. When they left, I wondered how many more of my staff would be coming to me to tax my mind and heart.

I rang the office, which I had left that day working smoothly on my rota. A Chinese clerk replied. This surprised me, as he had been on duty since 8 a.m. that day, and Heaven knows what time it was then. One or two in the morning, I think.

"What's wrong, Mr. Tok Seng?" I queried.

"I don't know, sir"—a trifle excitedly, I thought—"but nobody has been to relieve Maniam and me to-day. Is anything serious happening, sir? The whole town's in a panic."

"As far as I know everything is in order," I replied, for the Argyll and Sutherlands had been holding the Japanese for three days on the Grik Road; a detachment had come into Kuala Kangsar two days earlier for a rest, and was most optimistic on the situation, in spite of the absence of further reinforcements.

"Well, please, sir, may we go home, for we haven't slept for twenty hours, and we are afraid to go to sleep with the office open."

I told them to go home, and come back late on the next day, open the office, and await my arrival.

Surely I could have some sleep now; my eyes were leaden and smarting; I felt empty, weak, bereft of everything.

The telephone rang again; it was Major Wakeham.

"It just occurred to me that perhaps you haven't had time to find out the position up north because of the busy time you've had," he hinted cautiously, for the Fifth Column was never so thriving as amongst the Asiatics.

"No, I thought everything was O.K.," I replied.

"Not so good," Wakeham said "Have you made any arrangements for yourself?"

It had never occurred to me. Life had been such a hurly-burly, my work and the worries of my men, the evacuees, the increasing demands of the engineers, all these things had so occupied me that I had had no time to stop and think of my own position. Now where do I stand, I thought; what do I do next?

Wakeham supplied the answer. "You'd better make your own arrangements, for it may mean an hour, or three hours, or a day."

"Thanks for thinking about me," I said, for he had his own job to do.

"Not at all—we've taken your time, and it's the least I could do for you."

It was no good trying anything then. The house was a total black-out, and I was almost asleep on my feet. I went to bed, and the engineer from Kedah slept on the hardwood floor in the lounge, across the front door, with his rifle by his side.

No more than two hours later we were awake, and had some tea and fruit—there was nothing else in the house—and I started to pack my trunks. I was able to pack one cabin trunk to capacity and one small attaché case full of papers and letters. The rest had to be stuffed into the remaining space in the car. Thank God I bought a big car, I thought, for I was able to take every bit of clothing, my two wireless sets, my books, and even my cutlery in the boot, the whole of the back seat, and the front, leaving just enough room for myself to drive. I only left my furniture, pots and pans, pictures and curtains, glassware, and the empty trunks and tin-lined cases.

I was filling my car when Horsley came in from Sitiawan. He was a physical wreck, and I forgot myself when I saw his plight. He told me that he had been wearing the same clothes for three days—a terrible thing in the heat and dust of the tropics—and that he had had little or no sleep. I asked him how he had fared, and for the first time I saw in his face what were obviously signs of emotion.

"The Chinese down there are arming themselves with bamboo spears," he said, "and they think we're running away. One man came to me as I was blowing up petrol pumps, and asked: 'Does this mean that our protectors are deserting us?' I couldn't look him in the face."

I passed on Wakeham's friendly warning, and my chief went home to gather his things. He wasted no time, and took very little. I don't

know how many thousand dollars' worth of goods he left behind, but they were the accumulations of seventeen years in Malaya.

It was then that I began to see Horsley for the man he really was.

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Later in the morning the State Engineer and others came through from Taiping, and we were discussing the next move when a small deputation of members of my staff came to my quarters. They were clerks and overseers on monthly pay, and wanted their pay up to date, and permission to evacuate. I heard the full story from them; the chief clerk, the most respected man in Kuala Kangsar, had taken fright and fled to the forests. Chelliah, the man of authority, the trouble-maker, had run away also. Other responsible Asiatic staff had caught the breath of panic, and had disappeared. The coolies could do nothing, their bosses had gone and they were left without a soul to advise or lead them. Some had stayed in the coolie lines, but the majority had run away like so many sheep. I was to see many more examples of this wholesale panic before the year was out.

Only the faithful and most loyal had remained to take further orders. It opened my eyes to see who they were. There was Ramasamy, a weedy Tamil who had been in trouble many times for theft, and had been in danger of dismissal on several occasions. There was Mnttiah, the biggest crook of a storekeeper you could ever wish to meet. A young lad whose name I forget, a clerk in the Building branch, was blubbing in a pitiful way. I was heartened to see that the men I had trusted had stayed on; for, in addition to Brawn, Partridge, and Nathaniel, there was Phoon Tok Seng, the correspondence clerk, Inche Yun bin Ismail, financial clerk, and the diminutive Tamil Christian, Victor, my Building overseer. The State Engineer paid them as much as he could out of the limited amount of cash which he had brought from Head Office, and went on his way with the others to Ipoh. Horsley and I were to report to him there when we were ordered by the military to leave Kuala Kangsar.

We walked down the hill to the office, and Maniam helped us to remove or destroy all the secret plans and papers. Horsley took the money and more important documents from the safe. The store below had very little left of value to the engineers, but later in the day we were able to hand over quantities of tyres and tubes, picks and *changkols*, and a large stock of gelignite and fuse.

After a scratch lunch we went to the workshop to see if there was anything more we could save. An old lorry was standing in the yard, and we thought that if we could get a driver perhaps we could get the lorry and a load of spares and tools to Ipoh. We filled the petrol tank, and were searching for a can to fill with water when a figure appeared from the shadows of the timber-shed and pattered clumsily towards us, his rubber-shod feet making a slithering sound on the gritty yard.

"*Tabek, tuan*," said Zakariah, "this is hard, very difficult."

I asked him what he was doing in the workshop yard. They had taken his lorry, he said, and he wanted to stay and help us.

We let him fill the radiator with water, and then carried piston rings, connecting-rods, springs, and other spares to the lorry, filling baskets and stacking them as they were in the back. Zakariah helped us to load the tools and parts, and I began to wonder at this man's energy and enthusiasm in the face of the circumstances. We could not pay him—officially—for his services, as the P.W.D. had ceased to exist. And I knew, by the coolie's whole attitude on that day, that he was not seeking payment.

The lorry was soon filled, and Horsley and I discussed the possibility of getting a driver.

"Let's try the military," Horsley suggested, and we went to an Indian Army camp near by to beg for a driver.

A young Indian officer agreed to let us have a driver on condition that he would be given the lorry. That was what we wanted, of course; to give the vehicle to somebody who could use it. It was agreed that the driver should take the load to Ipoh, then report to an Indian Army camp there to await the arrival of the troops who were shortly to evacuate from Kuala Kangsar.

Half an hour later a tall, smiling Sikh reported to us. He was to drive the lorry to Ipoh, he informed us in faltering English. But he did not know the way to Ipoh, and the afternoon was almost evening. Could someone accompany him?

Neither Horsley nor I could go on the lorry, for we were under orders to remain in Kuala Kangsar until officially evacuated.

We tried to explain the route to the driver, but, though he listened with a pleasant smile, nodding his head at points in the narrative, he confounded us at the end by assuring us that he did not understand.

"*Tuan.*"

We had forgotten Zakariah. He stood in the background, but his timid voice drew our attention. He touched his *songkok* respectfully, then resumed his knuckle-cracking, weaving his long fingers in and out, crunching the bones like so many dry sticks.

"*Tuan*, I can go with the lorry."

He stood there, clasping and unclasping nervous hands, his whole bearing giving the impression that he was begging a favour.

I explained that if he went he would not be brought back, and might not be able to return even on foot. He understood. He must also have understood that there would be no P.W.D., no *tuan*, when—or if—he returned, nobody to pay him or find him food. This would certainly be his last job for us.

I hope he got through, and I hope he was able to return to his home. We never heard of the lorry again. And, save for this account of Zakariah's devotion to service, his deed would be forgotten.

The workshop was handed over, lock, stock and barrel, to the R.I.A.O.C., who wished to repair Bren-gun carriers and lorries. As darkness fell, two thoroughly disheartened P.W.D. officers returned home, without a job, a single follower, or even a lorry or pick and shovel to testify to the work they had done, to the care and energy they had put into the following of their profession.

In the meantime the military had occupied many quarters in the

town and had taken over the hospital. Horsley and I had paid off our servants, and the painful memory of that parting will never pass. We went to live in quarters occupied by Perry—a Drainage and Irrigation engineer—and the three of us slept side by side on two mattresses laid on the floor. Meals were served by Perry's one remaining servant, an old Tamil gardener.

I never realized before what fun you could have in the midst of trouble, provided the company was right. We had very little more than rice and bully beef to eat; but we had tea and whisky-and-sodas and plenty to smoke. Perry had a very amusing voice, deep, with a sort of a crack now and then, and we discovered that when he addressed his old *kebun* in Malay, the cheerful little Tamil replied in exactly the same voice. Horsley and I went to bed early on the first night, and we heard Perry talking to the servant. We both noticed the remarkable similarity of tone and inflection, so much so that we could not decide which man was speaking. Horsley chuckled, and I caught the germ; within five minutes we were roaring with laughter, and Perry was still talking away, oblivious of the entertainment he was providing. We let him into the secret when he returned, and he entered into a conspiracy with us. He spoke to the old man on every possible excuse, and it was as if his echo replied. The atmosphere of light-hearted goodwill was wonderful, as if Nature had thought quickly of a remedy for our depression, and had dispensed one out of the few materials available.

On the following morning, the 20th December, Horsley and I, having no work to go to, decided on a walk. We went to the post office and collected the mail. Most of the P.W.D. letters were to Asiatic staff, and one was for Partridge—from Malacca. I could not trace any of my former staff, but I kept the letters, hoping to meet one of them later. As we walked aimlessly around the town, looking at the shuttered shops and the idle crowds, we were aware of unrest, and a murmur arose along the street, increasing in intensity. People began to run, and soon we saw that everybody was moving towards the railway station. Out of idle curiosity we followed the crowd, and on arrival at the station we saw what was probably the whole of the population of the town mobbing around the platform and approach roads, pushing, swaying, in a sea of sound which was growing louder and louder like an uncontrollable mad thing.

The crowd was hungry.

CHAPTER VI

PART OF THE government's war programme had been the storage in bulk of rice, staple diet of the Asiatic. Kuala Kangsar had two railway go-downs prepared and 14,000 bags of limed rice, each weighing 180 lb., had been stored for distribution in an emergency. Two important factors were overlooked when the rice was put in bulk storage in this way. One was that a bag weighing 180 lb. requires four men to lift it, and is therefore

impossible for rapid handling. The other is that the ordinary Asiatic coolie type will panic at the least provocation, be it a food shortage, or rumour, or the sight of the military taking over the town. It only requires one man to start a panic. God knows who can stop it.

The engineers planned to destroy the rice go-downs, and the District Officer, who was also Food Controller, made a valiant attempt at distribution. With a few English schoolmasters he had opened one go-down, and tried to get the crowd to come up in fours to take the bags. The progress was so slow that the throng became restless with anticipation, and possibly from fear that they might be too late to collect their issue. They rushed the small group of men, and the go-down was closed.

Horsley and I were moved with pity at the sight, and we discussed the problem as we went home.

On the following morning the District Officer rang up to ask Horsley if he could provide some barbed wire and posts, in order to make a barrier at the go-down entrance. The idea was to allow sufficient space between two lines of wire for four men to drag a sack. It was a good idea, if there had been time to do it. Horsley obtained the materials, and worked with his bare hands to erect the barrier. We watched the second attempt, and saw it fail again. I had an idea, which I confided to Horsley, and we asked the District Officer for the gift of the far go-down on the other side of the railway. He was only too glad to let us try our luck.

We were determined that the rice would not be destroyed before we had done everything in our power to distribute it. To help us in our efforts we enrolled the services of Perry, and the Doctor and Health Officer. I took a small omnibus, and drove it myself; and we borrowed a three-ton lorry with driver. I led in the bus and ran it as quickly as possible to the far go-down. We had opened the doors, filled the lorry, and closed the doors again before the mob saw us. I ran at top speed towards the P.W.D. coolie lines and called out to the coolies. We had tipped the bags on the roadside in a few moments, and before the crowd had caught us up the rice had been taken away.

I had to think of something else for the next trip, for the crowd was waiting for me, and the second vehicle was already at the entrance. When I drew up to the go-down I observed that the Europeans were surrounded, the mob pressing so close that it was impossible for the huge doors to be opened. Horsley fought his way out and came up to me with a look of despair on his face. "It's no good," he said, "they won't give us a chance."

I looked round the crowd: Chinese, Indians, Malays, dirty and sweating, with hungry faces and the pitiful look of fear and despair in their eyes. Surely we could do something: the thought of fourteen thousand bags of rice going up in smoke whilst thousands of innocents starved was too much for me.

To this day I don't know why I did it—my mere twelve months in the country, compared with the experience of the other men, and their greater command of the language, must have made my action seem childish in the extreme. I struggled through the press and stood with my back to the great doors, a very young figure, not an awe-inspiring sight in my dirty clothes, with my red face streaky with perspiration.

I was afraid, fearful lest the mad swirl should overcome me in its insane pressure, but I was there, and there I had to stay, win or lose. I shouted for silence, and was amazed at the power of my own voice. Perhaps it wasn't my own, perhaps it was some sort of madness that had possessed me, or perhaps it was a force given to me to use for these poor wretches who were screaming for food. I shouted again and again; an old Chinese directly in front of me called my name and appealed for a bag of rice. I pushed my face into his and screamed him to silence. Subdued, he murmured to the men around him, and they ceased their shouting. I stood still, with my lips trembling and my knees feeling weak. Then, quietly, I told the front of the crowd that I could not open the door until they had heard what I was to say. The word passed round, and I stood waiting . . .

It probably took one minute to bring a deadly hush over the whole sea of faces; it seemed an age. I looked to my friends, who were standing by the lorry. They were quiet too, not sneering at my impertinence, but giving me the break I was appealing for. My first stepping-stone was behind me.

In simple terms I told them that we were there to give them all the rice they could carry. But as they were pressing so hard on the doors, and acting like madmen, we could do nothing. The doors would not be opened, I emphasized, until they had gone back ten yards. We would wait until they behaved like sensible men and women.

A murmur rose in the crowd again, and I wondered what was going to happen next. Then the mob receded, and my friends dashed forward to trim the ranks. I got into the lorry, displacing the driver, and started the engine. Still we waited, until the crowd stood silent again. I told the other fellows to get ready to open the door. At the word, the doors opened and the sea of smelly bodies rushed forward. They were too late, for I had already backed the lorry into the entrance, and the pressure of the mob held the doors hard against the sides.

Standing on the running-board of the lorry, I was able to pick out the familiar faces of a half a dozen of my old coolies, and I beckoned for them to come nearer. I promised them a full bag each if they would work all the morning, loading the lorry and dumping the bags to my orders. They scrambled over the vehicle and worked with the Doctor, Horsley, Perry, and the Health Officer in the go-down. The lorry was filled in two minutes, and I told them to be ready to close the doors as I ran out. The coolies and one of my friends climbed over the sacks on the lorry, and I set off as fast as the crowd would let me. I was singing, supremely happy, for we had succeeded. Half a mile farther on I told the men to drop the bags off the lorry one by one as I drove in bottom gear along a side road. The rice was pounced upon as by wolves.

When we returned, I handed the lorry over to its driver, who had got the idea, and one of the Europeans took charge. Then I repeated the method with the bus. We fed the huge bags through the narrow emergency exit at the back, whilst the Doctor stood guard at the front side entrance.

The atmosphere was almost unbearable. The rice was preserved in powdered lime, and each bag threw out a great volume of fine white

powder as it was dumped in the closed bus. The dust hung in the air like a thick fog, and as I was obliged to sit at the driver's seat, directing the loading, my throat felt dry and swollen, my nostrils were burning. I longed for a drink, but had no time to waste in seeking one.

When the bus set off the crowd rushed to clamber on, and some of the more agile Chinese actually succeeded in climbing up to the ledges of the cab windows. I was forced to drive slowly, and hammered at the grasping hands until they loosened their hold and their owners fell in the road. I was in a cold sweat of fear in case I should run over anyone, and my progress was erratic as I pulled my charge just clear of a wide roadside ditch or a pile of railway sleepers. At all events I must not stop, I must go on, on, no matter how slowly, but I mustn't stop. Eager faces lined the side roads now, for the crowd had seen the method we were using, and had left the go-down for the dispersal points. I had to run farther, and they followed me rather as hounds chase a fox, but with a grimmer lust than they. We pushed the bags out of the back and the side as we crawled along at a quiet point.

It went on for ages, and bags were scattered over the whole area of the town along the side lanes. It became a wild game, the crowd waiting to ambush us at all points, and we had to think furiously, using our knowledge of the town to outwit them. Once I saw Hussein, my former *sais*, and I confess to a little partiality then, for I called to him to follow, and as he came up running I ordered a bag to be dropped. He sat on it, a comic figure entirely alone by the roadside, unable to move the huge bag, but determined to sit on it until the necessary help came along.

I will say this for the mob: as soon as they saw that we were trying to do our best for them they treated the affair as a friendly game, and their cries of "*Tarek, tarek, tarek*" echoed my own cries as they pulled at the bags which were jammed in the bus doorways. When the bag was freed, it fell with a thud into the road, bowling over the pullers, and they yelled with triumph and relief as they sat on their prize. There was no fighting over the rice once it had been claimed. One young Tamil girl was nearest to a bag when it dropped on the roadside and she sat on it. Nobody tried to wrest it from her.

It was a slow process, but nobody was hurt, many were satisfied, and the District Officer's party were able to do a little better at their go-down, as the crowds were thinner. We could hardly see the impression we had made on the tremendous stacks of rice in the buildings, but we had tried. If we had only had time, say a week, we could have cleared the lot.

It was a hilarious party at Perry's that night. We were exhausted, hungry, dry; but after a bath and a drink we sat down to a most enjoyable meal. We stayed up late that night, telling yarns, the war forgotten, and no mention was made of our day's work; we knew that we had done our best.

The military asked us to move out of Perry's house on the following day, in order to accommodate newly-arrived officers. It only took us half an hour, as we had not removed the *barang* from our cars. We entered the doctor's house and prepared beds made of cushions on the floor. Then we left for our day's work. More rice had to be distributed,

the mail had to be collected, and Horsley and I had to assist the engineers in a wrecking expedition.

When Horsley and I arrived at the workshop, Wakeham and his men were already there. We witnessed the destruction of the petrol pump, the Dieseline tank and its contents, two lorries in for repairs, a steam-roller which had been brought in for overhaul, a concrete-mixer, and other plant. You can understand how Horsley and I felt when our new workshop was destroyed before our eyes. We looked at each other in blank dismay, and I believe we both thought the same thing. This was something we had fought to build, unromantic perhaps to anyone but an engineer who loved his work and all it meant; we had quarrelled with each other, even, to arrive at the standard of perfection we desired. And now, out of the ruins of our work, we looked and saw in each other the sympathy which we had failed to recognize in the early days.

Horsley spoke. "Come on, bo', we don't want to see this, do we?"

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We sat in the Club on the afternoon of the 22nd of December, and the engineers were with us after their wrecking trip was over. We felt miserable; our work was finished. Then we learnt that the Japs had cut across the Chenderoh Lake area from the Grik Road to Plus Road. This road runs to Sungei Siput, half-way between Kuala Kangsar and Ipoh. If they succeeded in gaining the main road the troops fighting on the Grik Road would be cut off from the south. Things were looking very black indeed. We were told to stand by for orders to move.

At 7 p.m. the stragglers of the Europeans in Kuala Kangsar formed up in the town for the trek to Ipoh.

CHAPTER VII

I PACKED INTO my car the few things I had been using during the preceding days, checked up for water and air, and left for Jalan Kangsar, where the convoy was to be formed. Down the hill I drove, past the clock which commemorated the Coronation. It had stopped, naturally, the men whose duty it was to tend it having ceased work four days ago. I had the sudden foolish thought that here was one job I could have done before I left, wind the clock up, but ruefully realized how meaningless were such ideas as I ran along Jalan Kangsar to take up my position at the tail of the convoy.

When my car was in position I walked up and down the line, smoking a cigarette and trying to keep out of mind the flood of memories which were making the parting so hard for me. Horsley came up and spoke in a low voice; rather as one speaks at a funeral. And Kuala Kangsar really was dead that night. A solitary Malay on a bicycle, a Penghulu, had come to say good-bye to one of the party. There was not a soul besides.

The young Police officer, my next-door neighbour, passed in his small Morris and gave me a cheerful grin. Good for him, thought I; he had not much about which he could smile, for his Police force had been disbanded and his wife had been evacuated to the south a few days after war had broken out.

The District Officer made hurried final arrangements with the convoy leaders. They walked back, counting us as they passed; we were all ready.

It was a moonless night when we moved off. We had left it a little too late, and three armoured cars headed the convoy in case we should meet trouble at Sungei Siput.

The convoy had only reached Iskandar Bridge when rain began to fall. My car battery had faded out, so that I had to race the engine to get a mere glimmer from the blacked-out lamps. If the engine stopped I should have to be pushed along in gear. We crawled along the bridge, over the trenches which contained enough gun-cotton to cut through the decking, bridged over by loose boards. Men were standing by to blow the bridge up as soon as we were over. Although we had only travelled three miles out of the thirty I was tired, my eyes were aching, and my ankles were weak from frequent braking. The engine was hot owing to the low gear work, for the car was overloaded and could not travel slowly in a higher gear.

When we were within two miles of Sungei Siput, at the point where the road runs under the railway in an S-bend, we came upon a convoy of army lorries, parked with lights out on each side of the road. The space left for traffic was about ten feet; it was pitch black and still raining. We stopped, and my engine stalled. When the convoy moved on, I just stayed where I was. It was hopeless trying to crank the engine—it took half an hour to find the hole, and it was a big car. Half a dozen Indian soldiers pushed me for a hundred yards before I could start. I gave them a tin of cigarettes and moved on.

The troops were lining the road for four miles, right through Sungei Siput, and I breathed a very large sigh of relief when we had left them behind. But a little farther on we were stopped by a flood. The heavy rains had covered the road to a depth of at least a foot for half a mile. I saw the shape of an army lorry bogged by the roadside as I passed.

We stopped, re-started, crawled along, stopped again, crawled a little farther, and stopped again. And so it was all the way. We arrived at Ipoh after four hours, having travelled thirty miles.

Horsley and I put up in an engineer's house for the night, and though I slept on the floor, that short rest was the most luxurious experience I had had for many long days.

We reported to the State Engineer the next morning, and were told that we were to strike farther south that afternoon. I had to get a new battery, for I couldn't go on like that. I went into the town with another young engineer, a new arrival named Jewkes.

Ipoh was a tragedy of desolation. The main streets were empty save for an occasional army lorry passing on patrol with a machine or Lewis gun crew on the alert for aircraft. The huge glass fronts of Borneo Motors and the other car dealers were shattered, the Chinese shops were

boarded up. A light coat of debris covered the broad carriageway. As we drove down the deserted street the air raid siren wailed its grim warning. A solitary Japanese bomber cruised casually overhead, and the ack-ack guns on the edge of the town followed its impertinent manoeuvres. We saw it dive very low, and heard a terrible explosion in the region of the railway station.

It was impossible to buy anything, as there was nobody there to sell; so we walked into a car-dealer's shop and selected a battery, one which was on the charging-bench, and filled it up with acid. I managed to get a spare wheel also, complete with tyre. They were about the only things left in the place, for the shelves of the store had been ransacked for spares by the military. The Japanese would get very little of value from Ipoh, we were glad to realize as we returned to the house.

A second bomber came overhead as we stood in the garden by the car. We sheltered beneath the trees so as not to attract attention, for the aircraft was flying very low, and we could pick out the Rising Sun on its silver wings. The plane went into a dive, straight from the sky towards the spot where we were standing, and we darted for cover. But there was a bigger prize two hundred yards away, at the station, and the raider released his bombs on an ammunition train. The din was terrific. A huge mass of black smoke rose high in the air, mingling with the smoke and flames of the oil and petrol which were burning from the first attack. Roll after roll of noise and great crashes of sound told of bursting tanks and exploding wagon-loads of ammunition. The sturdy house quivered at each reverberation.

The All Clear was sounded, but the explosions could still be heard when we left the scene at 2 p.m.

The rain was sheeting down, so that all windows of the car had to be closed. The interior steamed like a Turkish Bath, and every half-minute I had to run my hand over the wind-screen. Even that was very little help, as the visibility in a tropical rainstorm is almost nil. The strain of sitting bolt upright, watching for the car in front to stop or slow down, with eyes peering through the misty glass at the solid wall of rain, was too much for us to stand for very long. After an hour the convoy pulled into the roadside, and the occupants alighted to stretch their legs and ease their backs, not caring if they were drenched so long as there was a little relief. I remembered that a few bottles of beer had been stuffed into the car at the last moment, and we refreshed ourselves, finishing with a cigarette.

Tapah was our first stopping-place, and we besieged the Executive Engineer there at about 6 p.m. I was told to stay the night at the Rest House with another Assistant Engineer named Boardman, and we had visions of a real dinner, a soft bed, and a long night's rest, instead of the scratched meals, floors, and short naps of the previous week.

The Rest House was crowded. A construction unit of the R.N.Z.A.F. took up most of the room, and various officers of the Army and Engineers were occupying the rest. After a great deal of arranging, Boardman and I were given a room, which we shared with a young second lieutenant. The limited dining-space necessitated our waiting until someone had finished eating before we could grab a place at the table. The menu

was very simple, a particularly uninspiring soup, with sausage and mash to follow, and a cup of stewed tea.

When dinner was over we looked around for a seat in the lounge. Three people were sharing each chair, the most fortunate taking the seat and the others balancing on the arms. Then I heard my name, and recognized the speaker as Gaby, a pilot officer of the R.N.Z.A.F., whom I had met in Kuala Kangsar a week earlier. We were very glad to meet again, and he found me a seat and a drink. But my eyes could hardly keep open, and after a short time Boardman and I went to bed.

Harry Boardman had arrived in Malaya from England about a fortnight before the Japanese had bombed Singapore. He had not taken over a district when the orders were given to leave Taiping, where he had first been posted. As this was his first tour, his knowledge of Malay was confined to a handful of words, and he was at sea with the natives. He suggested that we stick together as much as possible.

The bedroom contained two single beds under one mosquito net. The three of us pushed the beds together and shared the space.

We were unfortunate in our journey from Ipoh to be accompanied by an engineer, who, under stress of the excitement, had given way to 'the jitters'. When the aircraft were overhead during the raids in Ipoh, he had cautiously donned a tin hat which he had managed to procure in Taiping, and stood solemnly between two brick walls beneath the house stairs, emerging only after we had assured him that the All Clear really had sounded and that no planes could be seen or heard. He had been most anxious to get on his way, and when the convoy had stopped for a rest *en route* he paced up and down the line of cars, all tin hat and mackintosh, a diminutive and nervous figure, trying to persuade us to forget our tiredness and push on to safer places.

Boardman and I had discussed this gentleman at some length, and our remarks amused our bedmate a great deal. He thought it extremely funny when Boardman was called to the telephone, which necessitated his dressing again, only to find that the person in question was anxious to know if we were all right. Boardman was inclined to be somewhat terse about it, until we pointed out the humour of the incident. We must have fallen asleep laughing, for the next time we awoke to a furious banging on the door. Boardman was wanted on the telephone again. His remarks were rather strong and very much to the point as he dressed.

A few moments elapsed before his return, with the news that we had to prepare to move on at once. I suppose it was 2 a.m. I jumped up, and was half-dressed before a thought struck me. "Who gave you that instruction?" I asked. Boardman grunted; "George," he said, referring to our nervous colleague.

We debated our next move, but I was certain that 'George' had acted on his own jumpy initiative and, as nobody else in the building had had any message, I said that I intended to stay where I was. Boardman agreed, but suggested that we sleep with our clothes on in case a genuine message should come through. We climbed on to the bed again, consigning George to a much warmer clime and to all manner of horrible experiences. The lieutenant roared with laughter, which this time Boardman and I were the ones to resent until we again realized it

had a funny side and dozed off amidst chuckles and general good humour.

After another half-hour the telephone rang and Boardman answered it again. Sensing what it signified, I put on my shoes and packed a small bag. Boardman returned to say that the whole convoy was awaiting our arrival and we must hurry.

I was in a very bad humour indeed when we reached the party. Horsley was there, looking particularly tired, and I asked him if anyone had thought of checking up on the message. Nobody had. Our nervous friend had heard something from the Local Defence Corps, had jumped to his own conclusion and had passed on the word to the State Engineer, who headed the convoy. Again George had fooled us and there was no point in returning to bed. At 3 a.m. the convoy was on its way farther south.

I followed Horsley's car, and had to keep the tiny red light of his number plate within close range owing to the mist which had followed the rain of the previous day. We were constantly overtaking stationary lines of army vehicles, which took up most of the narrow carriageway, and after half an hour's running the car in front stopped. Horsley came up to me, said that he had lost the rest of the column and was so tired that he was dozing at the wheel. We ran on a few more miles until we reached a small village, and Horsley stopped again. He declared he could go no farther, and proposed to sleep in his car until dawn. One more car was following me, and we three drew in to the side, switched off our lights, and fell asleep.

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The light of dawn awoke us, objects of interest and amusement to the earlier risers of the village. We were able to obtain water for the cars and oranges to quench our thirst. After a cigarette we proceeded south to find the others.

We found the convoy at Slim River. The cars had been pulled into the rubber out of sight of reconnaissance aircraft, and the State Engineer was in consultation with an army captain. We were to split up into units, working under the military, and our work was to be jungle clearing and rubber felling, using estate coolies. Horsley, Boardman, Jewkes, myself, and five or six other engineers were instructed to proceed to Tanjong Malim, on the Perak-Selangor border, and to establish ourselves in the Rest House there until further orders.

Horsley found a Chinese coffee-house in Slim River, and for the small sum of twenty-five cents we each had four boiled eggs, toast, and tinned butter and several cups of tea. It was the most delicious meal I had ever tasted, and I realized that enjoyment of a meal depends not so much on what you eat, and not at all on where you eat it, but on just how much you really need it. We had to go much farther, and there were occasions when we fared much worse.

We reached Tanjong Malim, the site of the famous Sultan Idris Training College, at noon. British and Indian troops, engineers, and an Australian transport unit, had taken over most of the accommodation,

and the Rest House was already filled with army officers and evacuees. We had to prepare our own meals from the tinned foods we were carrying, and spent the afternoon sorting out the goods in our cars.

It was evening when the newly-formed P.W.D. Construction Unit installed itself in Changat Asa Rubber Estate. Two Assistant Managers' bungalows, the previous occupants of which were serving in the Volunteers, were handed over for our use.

The first and most urgent thing to be done was to take the tremendous load off our cars. Since 18th December the springs had been turned down, and we had travelled the full length of the State of Perak. We took out the clothes and cases, wireless sets, shoes, soap, towels, bottles, tins of food, and blocks of chocolate, pooled all our resources, and handed the food and drink to the boy who had been provided with the house.

It was Christmas Eve. Peace on Earth and Goodwill towards Men seemed to be a long way away, but we decided to have a celebration. There were only three of us on the first evening: Jewkes, Boardman, and myself. Our Christmas dinner was tinned sausages, tinned peas, rice, tinned soup, some puffy dry biscuits, and coffee. As a special treat we had a glass of *crème de menthe*. Somehow, out of the plain meal in that dark, uninteresting house we three of but brief acquaintance found, for a short while, the spirit of Christmas.

December 25th, 1941, in Tanjong Malim was the strangest Christmas Day I have ever experienced. The senior officers of the unit had made arrangements for the coolies from Changkat Asa and another estate to commence work on felling the rubber trees along the line selected by the Army for defence. To reach the site of the clearing it was necessary to drive northwards from the town for two miles or so over a steel girder bridge which carried the Main Trunk Road across a river some forty or fifty feet wide.

The lorry loads of coolies, *parangs*, *changkols*, and axes arrived in the early morning, and the men were put to work. The estate had also sent a number of women and children, who we decided would be more of a hindrance on our class of work than a help. The men were put on felling, and the women were chiefly cutting down *padi bukit*—a particular type of rice which grows on hillsides in dry land, not the usual kind which is planted in water. The rice was ripe for reaping, and there must have been almost a square mile of it to be chopped down. The rubber trees to be felled were of a fair age, with stout trunks and large, top-heavy branches. As they grew to the edge of the road, on sloping land, we were faced with a difficult job to fell without causing serious obstruction.

We were concerned to find that the coolies had not the slightest idea as to how to fell a tree. Two Tamils would take axes and proceed to pick away all round the base, as one imagines rats might gnaw at the trunk. The tree would begin to sway and the coolies would scream warnings to all and sundry. The whole crowd would stop, those near-by scampering for their lives, while those out of range would stand and laugh. This was all very entertaining in its way, but within half an hour the fallen trees were lying about in a mad criss-cross, some only half-felled, and we had to go over the area again, chopping and lopping and pulling branches clear.

We then had to instruct these poor rubber-tappers in the art of felling.

The Tamils stood by and grinned as we sweated with the axes, cutting the conventional notches fore and aft. There were awkward moments when even our careful cutting failed to drop the tree in the right direction, owing to its lopsidedness or collision, in falling, with a near-by tree. But we were moderately successful, and soon the coolies had got the idea.

We were settling down to a more or less organized day's work when the drone of aircraft was heard; the coolies stopped work, an excited jabbering broke out, and suddenly everyone was running. Direction was of no consequence so long as these poor creatures could satisfy the mad instinctive urge to get away from the place where they were standing.

The women were terror-stricken; they crouched on the ground as the Jap passed over, and retched violently, their moans and cries joining in a fearful wail.

In the near distance we could hear the explosion of bombs, and we looked at each other in dismay. They were bombing Tanjong Malim. That was the end of that, we thought; no more work could be got out of these people. As the bombing continued the distress amongst the coolies increased, and when at last the aircraft returned and flew home, many of them picked up their lunch-tins and ran away. We never saw them again.

The leaders of the gangs came to us in a deputation and asked to be allowed to go home.

A council of war was held amongst the trees and all the coolies were called together in a circle. We asked them what they were afraid of, and they explained that their wives and children were in the Coolie Lines and might have been bombed. They could not work whilst their families were in danger.

Somebody had an idea—the sort of idea that comes just when it is most needed and saves the situation. If we sent the women and children, the men would stay on to work. The women were put in two lorries and sent home. Then we explained that we shouldn't employ the women again, and so they could stay in the Lines to tend the other women and children.

The coolies stayed on. We treated them carefully that day, and allowed them to return earlier than the appointed time to see their families.

Going home we found that the bombs had been aimed at the station, and that a coach had been destroyed. The wooden platform buildings were damaged and a stone wall partly demolished. The amount of damage was very small, and we observed that a crater in the road was only about nine inches deep and four feet in diameter. As far as we could ascertain, nobody had been hurt.

On the second day we made good progress, the only interruption being that caused by a reconnaissance plane, which had a good look at the work we were doing and flew off.

In the meantime the State Engineer had gone to Kuala Lumpur to arrange about supplies, money for coolies, and other matters, and he returned one evening with the news that the nine P.W.D. engineers of our party had been given temporary commissions. We inquired the

reason, and were told that, as we had to work with the military, and ran the risk of being cut off by the enemy, we were likely to be shot out of hand as civilians. The uniform would at least assure us of some measure of respect by our captors.

Our captors. The thought of being captured or killed had not entered our heads until that night. Boardman, Jewkes, and I spoke little of that possibility, but I am sure we were all thinking the same thing as we joked and ragged each other about our commissions.

An issue of uniforms followed, and we were busy sorting out the tin hats, boots, and belts. We were not supplied with revolvers, as there were none available, and I was relieved, as I had not the slightest idea how to use one.

The planters who had joined forces with us—they were old soldiers—helped us with our uniforms and gave us a few tips. But the whole thing was a joke to us, though the military had stressed its necessity, and we called ourselves 'Nunn's Army', after the Director of Public Works. This soon degenerated into looser description, until the title crystallized into 'The Circus'.

And very much like a circus we looked. The issue of uniforms was inadequate, so that we wore half-uniforms for the most part. I abandoned my white topee, the only alternative being a tin hat. Others wore black shoes and cotton stockings because the army boots didn't fit. Working with us were the civilians, Mack, the Scots planter, old Dick Prior, and others. Mack drove a bright red omnibus around, and the rest of the fleet consisted of a variety of P.W.D. lorries. But we had a job of work, and were content to do it from dawn till dusk, with no money troubles, no problems of dress, no 'paper work', no red tape. Each evening we sat talking of the day's problems, and decided on the morrow's working. We were a unit, independent, free, of value to the military, doing a vital job that occupied us to the full.

Major Wakeham, my old friend from the Iskandar Bridge job, inspected our progress with a Captain Wilson on the third day, and outlined the work yet to be done. I was transferred from the rubber felling to the area where *padi bukit* and jungle trees were to be cleared, and a number of Chinese were added to the labour force. Chinese are stronger workers than Tamils, claim higher wages, and will work under more arduous conditions. The next few days were to be a test of this staying power.

On the fourth day we experienced our first Japanese leaflet raid. The usual daily reconnaissance plane flew along our line, and we lay low so as not to be visible. As the aircraft turned to fly home, I saw a puff of smoke behind it, and then heard a pop. I thought that perhaps it had been a backfire of the exhaust, and we resumed our work.

Half an hour later I noticed that the coolies were chattering loudly and looking into the sky. I wondered what was causing the disturbance, and a strange sight met my eyes as I peered against the strong light above. As far as the eye could see there were tiny flashing red flakes, descending with infinite slowness over the whole area of the *padi* field. As the shower came nearer the ground I picked the flakes out to be pieces of red paper, fluttering and turning, wheeling and floating in the still

breathless air. It seemed an age before the first sheets fell on the ground.

I picked one up. The message was written in Jawi, the natural alphabet of Malay, adapted from the Arabic, and in very bad English. The text was as follows:

"FROM AN INDIAN SOLDIER TO AN ENGLISH OFFICER.

"Why don't you give us soldiers enough food to eat? While we are fighting you English have plenty to eat."

If the intention was to incite our Indian labourers against us, it was a miserable failure. Those coolies who could read at all could only read their native Tamil, and the excitement of the pamphlet raid had passed before any of them could obtain translations. I was interested in the papers myself, because the Jawi must have been written by a Malay, which added more evidence of the Fifth Columnist activities of that race.

Two other types of leaflets had been dropped at points amongst our widely dispersed gangs. One was a very crude cartoon of a huge white man, intended to represent a wealthy planter, he held a Malay woman on his knee, and a glass of some drink was near by. The second paper had printed on it a cartoon of English troops carrying off native women. Beneath each cartoon were the words:

"THE WHITE DEVILS WHO WILL SOON BE DRIVEN OUT OF THIS COUNTRY."

By the fifth day, in spite of the care we took to show as few scars as possible, the line of felling must have been clear to the regular reconnaissance aircraft. I was not surprised, therefore, to see two bombers approaching at midday, and I called out to the coolies to get under cover. They disappeared like a breath of wind, and I climbed into a small barn constructed of split bamboo walling and *attap* roof, through the walls and crevices of which I had a perfect view without showing myself.

As there was no opposition of any kind, the planes flew low, in a circle about a mile in diameter. The first got into position so that he would pass straight over the centre of the area on which my coolies were working, and then dived.

My flimsy hiding-place was directly in his path and the sight of the aircraft making straight for me was too awe-inspiring for me to realize my danger. Was it going to be bombs or bullets, I wondered, in the second's time of his dive.

It was bullets. With a deafening crackle the guns opened fire. He had passed on, and was probably fifty feet above the tiny hut at the bottom of his dive. The bomber climbed away, turning for a second assault.

I don't know what type of aircraft it was, nor how many guns there were for firing forward, but he hadn't even hit the hut. He had passed over the coolies' hiding-place before opening up.

The second plane centred itself, and went into its awful dive. This time my hair prickled and the perspiration flowed more freely. I could not move. It would have taken five minutes for me to find any other place of hiding, for the barn stood in the middle of a large area of cut *padi*.

I saw a small silver bomb drop from the fuselage, and it seemed to be coming straight for me. Foolishly, for I had no means of protecting myself, I threw myself flat on the floor, and waited.

The bomb missed me by fifty yards, fell into the scrub on the edge of the jungle, and exploded harmlessly.

I hadn't a great deal of interest in the events of the next few moments, but lay on the floor, watching the aircraft turn and climb, come round and dive again, drop the small bombs, and return for a further attack. Once they machine-gunned the area where the coolies were hiding, but the spot was littered with huge fallen trunks, and I was sure that nobody had been hit. No more bombs were aimed at the area near to me, every one falling in the thick jungle on the edge of the site.

The raid was over, and I called out my men. There was a great deal of excitement, and I wondered whether or not I should have any men working on the morrow. But as nobody was hurt it was possible to counteract the nervousness by calm reassurance, and when we at last resumed work the atmosphere was quiet and normal.

On returning to the Mess I was met by a barrage of questions, for the engineers on the other portions of the works had seen that we had been in the thick of it. I resolved to put my men on a portion of the job a little distance away from the day's target, and to oscillate them from day to day.

The wisdom of this was proved on the following day, when the area was attacked again. The nearest bomb dropped fifty yards away, fortunately in thickish jungle, and once again nobody was hurt.

We had a surprise in store for the Japanese when they called on us for their third day's raid, for an anti-aircraft gun had been placed at the bridge in the town, and its accurate fire caused them to maintain a fair height and keep away. Bombs were dropped on a line of army vehicles between the bridge and our work, and when we returned home we saw a burnt-out truck smouldering in the middle of the road, and a second one, which apparently had been unable to avoid the vehicle in front, charred on its front wings and bonnet and all four wheels tyreless. There were small pieces of burning rubber and patches of burning oil in all directions, and it was necessary to pull the car well off the road and pass on the grass verge. A little farther on a slight *camouflet* effect had been caused by a bomb exploding on the top of a bank by the roadside, the screeding soil and gravel having covered a portion of the road.

By this time we expected aircraft every day, with raids growing in intensity. On 1st January we had the heaviest and most disastrous raid of all, the sort of raid which we came to recognize as the forerunner of each big Japanese push southwards.

From 1st January until the day we left, my gang was working on the top of a hill, clearing jungle to form a rentus over its crown. From this point we were able to see all that happened two miles away.

An aircraft came over, circling over the area, and the ack-ack had a few rounds at it. Presently two more planes arrived, and formed up in the circle which we had found was their favourite strategy. They were keeping a good height, owing to the gun-fire, for the gunners were

following them round very well, and a wide circle of smoky dots showed the accuracy of the fire.

Suddenly, to my great surprise, for it was surely suicide, a plane dived, and I saw it come out of its dive and wheel round as a rumble of explosions reached my ears. The second followed, and again came the noise of bursting bombs. Number three repeated the operation, and then all the aircraft made off at top speed. Were my eyes deceiving me, or was one of them losing weight? A thin trail of smoke followed it, and certainly the plane appeared to be in difficulties. I stood up and yelled "We've got one!" with such excitement that my coolies poked their heads out of the scrub to see what was amiss. I told them in Malay what had happened, and they let up a cheer, and one old Chinese picked up his long-handled billhook, put it to his shoulder as he would a rifle, and taking careful aim at the fast disappearing aircraft, made a realistic impersonation of a penny popgun. We continued the work.

The time came for the paymaster to appear, and the coolies were gathered together on the roadside. The tools had been checked, we were only waiting for lorries and the men's pay.

Half an hour passed before we received word that the bombs had damaged the bridge, and the lorries and cars were marooned on the other side of the river.

It was agreed that we should walk back to the town and pay off the men there. When we arrived a sorry sight met our eyes. The flimsy wooden fronts of the shops were shattered, glass and bits of brick, earth and wood were sprinkled over the street.

A stick of bombs had been dropped across the steel bridge. Along the bank ran a neat line of five craters, about twenty yards apart. One bomb had fallen obliquely under the bridge, which was only about six feet above the bank at that point, and had blown the decking upwards, buckling the deck framing. The main structure was undamaged. On the far side of the river a whole salvo of small bombs must have been aimed at the road, for a large house on one side had been wiped out completely, leaving a sorry heap of debris and charred wood.

The Royal Engineers were already on the job, and after four hours we were able to cross the rough timber patch and go home.

As I stood at the bridge approach, a Chinese coolie came staggering up the street towards me; a number of the workmen were walking behind him, chattering excitedly. He was jerking his legs in an erratic manner, and his whole frame shook as he rocked from one leg to the other. His head was flopping and wagging from side to side, his arms flapping as if the muscles had been cut at the shoulders.

The man tried to speak to me; he wore a silly grin, and his incoherent Malay tumbled uncontrolled from his almost motionless lips. I looked inquiringly at a near-by coolie, who explained that the man was asking for yesterday's pay; he had not worked to-day, they explained, and had been in the town when it was bombed. The bombs, they said, had made him *bodoh*—silly.

The sight of this poor, blast-wrecked creature sickened me more than anything I had ever seen of death or blood or pain. Here, I thought, was one of the many unsuspecting victims of our Western civilization.

It was a very quiet meal that night. A coolie and a boy had been killed near their lines in one of the estates from which we were drawing labour. There would be no coolies from that estate again. In fact we should be fortunate if any coolies were available at all, for the whole town's population had probably fled.

On the following day only a handful of Tamils and the Chinese came to work. I took my men to the job on the hill, placing them a short distance from the previous day's site, and promised that I would sit all day on the other side of the valley, watching over them and keeping my eyes open for aircraft coming from the north.

A dozen times or more I saw or heard the approaching bombers in the distance, and I called out in warning. After a few times the coolies grew very keen, and the situation became something of a joke. In fact, I laughed heartily at the antics of some of the men, especially one old Chinese who wore a very faded blue overall suit and a dirty white topi. He disliked the prickly grass and ferns, and picked his knees up high in the air as he bounded for cover, stepping gingerly in the deep undergrowth. The speed and completeness with which the coolies disappeared was comical in the extreme.

My own position was not so secure, as there was no cover on my side of the valley. But I wore all khaki, and a tin hat, and I lay flat amongst the sparse ferns, watching for the machines to pass on. I was rapidly becoming an artist at camouflage, for even a thermos flask must be hidden and masked by ferns lest its silver cap should catch the pilot's eye, and my white skin was covered over by folding my arms under my chin as I lay on my stomach, and tipping my tin hat over my neck.

On one occasion the pilot must have spotted us, for, when I thought he was passing on, he turned, banking steeply, dived, and raked the valley with his guns. I was sick with fear that my coolies had been hit, and held a muster immediately the aircraft had flown off. Nobody was so much as scratched, and we went back to work again.

At last I called the Chinese off, and we walked up the lane to the roadside. Yet another bomber flew over, and I called the coolies to take cover in the ditch. As we lay there, two great army lorries drove into the lane at speed, the drivers jumped out, and ran for their lives. They were both Asiatics, and I thought that they had panicked.

The aircraft seemed to be machine-gunning the rubber a little farther up the road, then he turned and flew off. The anti-aircraft gun must have been silenced on the previous day, for there was no firing.

I stood up, brushed the dirt from my clothes, and called the men. When the Asiatic drivers returned we saw that they were amazed to find thirty or forty Chinese gathered round their vehicles. The reason for their leaving the lorries so hurriedly was explained when they showed me the contents.

We had been seeking protection in the ditches on either side of a lorry loaded to the roof with about five tons of gun-cotton, and another full of ammunition.

Our work on the hill was finished, and the gang was transferred to a site near to the Mess on Changkat Asa Estate. The numbers were gradually dwindling, thanks to the nuisance raids, and on the 4th January

only a handful of Chinese remained. But our job was almost finished, and the Royal Engineers had already taken over for construction of gun-pits.

On the afternoon of the 4th we were instructed to move south, and the evening was spent in loading our lorries with petrol, tools, spares, and all the materials necessary for running the Unit. After a quick meal we loaded our cars, and at 10.30 p.m. the convoy resumed its weary trek.

CHAPTER VIII

BOARDMAN'S CAR AND mine were at the tail of the convoy as we wound along the road towards Kuala Lumpur. Sitting at the wheel that black night, I wondered why we had been instructed to move at that unreasonable hour, after a hard day's work. My eyes soon began to feel the strain, and my ankles were trembling from the constant suspension over the pedals. The road was a solid mass of traffic, some parked by the roadside without lights, others crawling along and stopping with a jerk as an obstruction, possibly a mile ahead, loomed suddenly out of the darkness in front of the leading vehicle. Sometimes a short line of fast-moving ambulances blasted us from the road, and we had to pull in quickly to let them pass. A block would occur as a convoy of lorry-borne troops attempted to get through against the flood of southward-bound traffic, and everything would be chaos as we tried to clear a lane for them. The road was narrow, and winding in places round blind bends. On one length of particularly winding road we were held up so long that we took the chance of a drink and a few biscuits whilst we were awaiting the order to move.

Hour after hour passed by; the water in the radiator was boiling, the smell of oil and rusty steam rose to my dry throat and I felt jaded and weak.

The road between Rasa and Batu Caves was worse than ever. As we approached one village, a figure jumped out into the narrow, dim beam of the lights and yelled: "Put your lights out!" On either side of the road I could see the black shapes of great army lorries, and my over-worked eyes strained to find the clear lane some ten feet wide through the total darkness.

At last the road cleared a little and we emerged to find that all but four cars had gone ahead, and we had lost them. We made a little better speed then, until we had passed through Kuala Lumpur, and it was decided to give up the chase and to find some place to rest. One of our party knew the Rest House at Kajang, and we entered the village. The Rest House loomed up on the right-hand side of the road, and the cars ran into the compound and stopped underneath the trees. I recollected nothing more until I awoke at daylight, still in the car. The mosquitoes had bitten me badly, and my mouth was dry and tasted of rust.

Boardman and the others came out of the Rest House and laughed at me. They said I had fallen asleep as soon as the car engine had stopped. They had managed to drag themselves up the steps and had slept on the veranda's long chairs.

The Chinese Boy was taken aback to find us in occupation when he opened the doors, but he hurried into the town to buy food for breakfast.

An amazing, and at times amusing, procession passed before our eyes as we sat on the veranda awaiting the meal. Steam-rollers, tractors, lorries laden with pipes and barrels and furniture, army trucks, omnibuses, men on bicycles, and private cars streamed past the Rest House.

The alert wailed out on the morning air. The traffic stopped and the drivers darted from their vehicles to take cover. What had been a noisy, clanging, hooting, rattling pandemonium became an abyss of silence. Two steam-rollers were stopped in the middle of the road, their nervous Tamil drivers having rushed for the nearest ditch.

After two or three minutes of dead silence I saw the roller drivers emerge cautiously from their hiding-place. They looked around them and up into the sky. A short, excited conversation followed, and suddenly the calm air was broken by the hiss of steam and a great clanging rattle. The bold Tamils had decided to risk it and they were making a dash for it at the rate of four miles an hour.

The word went round that the Japanese had succeeded in landing on the west coast just north of Kuala Lumpur, and once again were threatening to cut off the forces fighting on the Perak border. That explained the order to move on the previous night, and the presence of troops at Batu Caves.

As we were sitting down to breakfast some of our party came in. They, too, had stopped at Kajang for the night. A telephone message had come through from Head Office, Singapore, and we were to proceed to Seremban and then on to Johore.

After filling up with petrol, oil, and water, we formed up in convoy and moved in, this time in daylight, thank God. The run to Seremban was easy, and we arrived in time for tea. But we could not stay; we must drive on to Segamat.

Boardman was ahead of me, and his small car was unable to keep pace with the more powerful car in front when the convoy reached a clear length of road. Within an hour we were alone, and we stopped to consider what we should do. After running on a little farther we called in at a small Chinese coffee-house for a refresher, and it was dusk before we moved on.

Rain began to fall to add to the difficulties of the darkness, and we were on an unknown route. The cars crawled along, but fortunately the road was clear. Suddenly a voice we knew rang out in summons, and we pulled up sharply. It was one of the engineers, who had been posted to catch us as we passed. There was a place here where we could spend the night, and we were to pull in to an estate.

We found that we were just outside Gemas, but a few miles from Segamat. An empty bungalow was at our disposal, and the thought of a comfortable bed was even more exciting than the prospect of a solid meal.

Rain was pouring down as we drew up to the door of the house. We were wet through before we had dispersed the cars and taken out the changes of clothes and other kit. We ate a dinner of tinned stuff, the sight of which was beginning to make us feel sick, and went to bed.

The whole of the house was mosquito-proofed, but the area round the beds themselves was also surrounded by netting on a wooden frame. A cubicle with two doors formed the entrance to this cage of finely-meshed wire, and one door had to be closed before opening the second. One would have thought that this double protection would have discouraged even the stoutest insect. But I had been in bed only about two minutes when the attack began. From that moment until the following morning I was pricked and bitten and tortured almost to distraction. The trouble with a mosquito net is that if a mosquito does succeed in obtaining admission it cannot get out and does not get out until it has dropped off the unhappy sleeper—or non-sleeper—having filled itself to over-flowing with good red blood. I felt sure that these mosquitoes wore army boots, were fitted with superchargers, and used bayonets.

I arose—it cannot be said that I awoke, for one never really sleeps during an intensive mosquito raid—and had a very thorough bath, using a great deal of soap to kill the itch of the large red lumps where the insects had feasted. I was feeling very bad-tempered when I went in to breakfast. A good meal would have mollified me, but we ate the remains of the dry, uninteresting stuff we had had the night before.

We left Gemas early and reached Segamat in the middle of the morning. There the cars were refuelled and watered and the convoy went on its way.

My introduction to Johore was very pleasant. The State roads were wide and well kept, and I was reminded of more peaceful days when I saw the coolies cutting the grass by the roadsides, some with scythes—which the Tamil has mastered until he can stroke its razor-like blade along with a wide sweep and cut the grass of a tennis court—some using the older type of knife, a curved affair about a foot long with a three-foot handle, which the grass-cutter swings round in a continuous circle up above his head and down to the ground with a swish and a spray of green slivers.

Boardman and I had allowed the others to push ahead, for there was no need to hurry, and the day was young. We decided to make this part of the run at least as much of a pleasure as possible. We stopped at one very clean, tidy village, and had tea and cakes and slices of fresh pineapple. We also bought some fruit, and continued on our way, leisurely eating the bananas and rambutans as we cruised along.

There was very little traffic, and the Japanese seemed far away. Only occasionally did we pass or give the road to a solitary military vehicle.

One hundred yards from Kulai village the petrol in Boardman's car ran out, and, I had to tow him to a pump. A Chinese shopkeeper ran out to take our order, and the trouble started.

We were back in the land of order. Boardman could have no petrol without coupons.

Since the second week of the war, when rationing and, for that

matter, public supply of petrol broke down in the north, our cars had been fuelled by military issues. Our unit was given drums of petrol, and we loaded them ourselves on our lorries, to feed the convoy as we came down. For a few care-free days we had had no worries about coupons, licences, insurances, or even bills. Now we were in civilization again and we must adjust ourselves.

Boardman looked at me in dismay. We had no coupons for Johore.

I argued with the Chinese in charge of the pump. No, he was afraid to break the regulations.

A Malay policeman came up to see what was causing the trouble, and I explained our position to him. He pondered awhile, then instructed the Chinese to give us the petrol. Grumbling and muttering in his native tongue, the man filled up the tank, and only when Boardman paid him did he brighten up and accept the situation.

The delay at Kulai was unfortunate, as we did not reach Johore Bahru until dusk. The District Engineer was about to leave his office, and told us to follow his car.

He led us to the Club. There, lounging against the bar, dressed in white shorts and shirts and tennis shoes, were two men, just back from an evening's tennis. They were P.W.D. engineers.

Yes, we were back in civilization. Immaculate figures lounged in the rotan chairs, a pleasant buzz of small talk filled the air, boys hurried amongst the tables. Women in flowery frocks sat knitting and reading. "They must have heard of the war, surely," I whispered to Boardman, and he laughed. The scene was comic to us, like another world.

I looked around, to find that we were the objects of interest in the room. Suddenly I realized how grubby we must look, our soiled uniforms wet with perspiration, our faces streaked and grimy, hair disarranged. Our shoes had not been cleaned for a week, our cotton clothes had no starch in them.

"What'll you have?" invited one of the tennis players. And so we entered into conversation.

They had heard of our work in the north and of the nine commissions that had been given to our unit. We soon found that the latter was the most interesting news to them, for they had had no commissions given to them, and we learned that a scheme was being put forward to follow our precedent by giving commissions to all P.W.D. engineers.

We were given a meal in the lounge and I raised the question of accommodation.

"That's difficult," said the District Engineer. "There are five people living in my quarters already."

I restrained a desire to laugh, we had been sleeping, four, five, six in a bedroom for weeks, and as many as eighteen in one house.

"We can sleep on the floor, you know," I explained. "In fact, I shall probably be unable to sleep in a bed now."

We went along to the District Engineer's quarters, a palatial house with spacious rooms and neat lawns and flower-beds, standing on the higher ground on the edge of the town. "I thought of my garden in Kuala Kangsar, already overgrown before" I left; the tomatoes and bringals would be ready for the Japanese to pick, I realized.

The occupants were at a loss as to how we should be accommodated. I observed that the lounge on the first floor would hold two camp beds comfortably, and in a short time the beds were found. We rigged up mosquito-nets across the room and prepared for bed.

"Here, you go and sleep in our bedroom," said one of the men. "You need a decent sleep; two of us will doss down here."

We inspected the bedroom offered; two twin beds lay cool and white beneath mosquito nets. A door was partly opened on the far wall, and, glory be! there was a bath—a 'long bath', as we termed the English type—white and clean, with water laid on. I jerked myself back to reason, for the sight of a proper bathroom was novel after the tubs and dippers we had been glad to use on our journey. I should have liked then and there to fill the bath up with warm, sudsy water, and lie for hours with eyes closed, letting my salty, sticky skin soften and my thoughts glide far away in the luxury of that bath.

I suddenly felt tired.

"You'd better have a drink before bed," suggested Morgan; and I thought perhaps that was a good idea.

As we sat in the luxurious lounge, with the wireless giving the news, I forgot that the enemy were up the road, and started to think of everyday things. I must have my car cleaned, look to my batteries. I hadn't drawn my December salary. I must find a dhobi to wash my clothes. I ought to write home. Wonder what she's doing now? Let me see, is Greenwich in front or behind Malayan time? Wish I could get at my carpet slippers; must cash a cheque to-morrow . . .

"Hey! Don't fall asleep here!"

I rose, and Morgan smiled.

"Come on, Boardman, old man," I murmured; "no mosquitoes to-night."

CHAPTER IX

WE AROSE RATHER late on the following day and drove into Singapore to report to the Director of Public Works. As we passed along the Causeway Chinese coolies were drilling the granite for blasting charges and troops were guarding the approach.

Mr. Nunn, wearing the uniform of a Group Captain, received us very warmly and asked us many questions about our work on the way down from Perak. I was struck by the intimate and friendly atmosphere of our interview, and as we left he wished us the best of luck.

Boardman had the address of a young couple from his home town in the north of England, and he suggested that we ask them to put us up for the night; it would be hopeless attempting to find hotel accommodation. We found the house and were made welcome for the night.

Next day we went into the town and spent the day shopping. Raffles Place showed signs of raid damage, the big European stores being boarded

up where bombs had shattered the windows. The town was overcrowded with military and civilians, and the banks and stores were thronging with people.

We were reluctant to return to the home of our previous night's host, as we had caused some inconvenience, so Boardman suggested that we try to make contact with a man who had been a fellow-passenger on the voyage from England a couple of months before. We found his address and left the town for the outskirts as the sun was setting.

I was cruising quietly along the road in the wake of Boardman's car when I saw a familiar figure, stick in hand, swinging along the grass verge. I pulled up and hailed Mr. Yell, my acquaintance of the Penang Guest House.

He was as bright and cheerful as ever, and as he related the details of his evacuation from the doomed island, I wondered at the high spirits, splendid condition and abounding good humour of the elderly man. I asked about Alec Cockburn, but he had not heard any news of him, and I made a mental note to call on Alec's firm as soon as possible.

We parted wishing each other the best of luck—that had become the standard form of farewell within the past month—and I hurried after Boardman's car, my mind full of thoughts of my friends in Penang.

Boardman's friend not only arranged for our accommodation for the night but took us out for dinner in a Chinese restaurant. There he told us of his adventures since the war had begun.

He had been a flight-lieutenant in the R.A.F. in England, but had left the Service at the end of his term, just before the war started. He had come out to Malaya with the idea of starting a business, but when the war in Malaya began he volunteered for service in the Malayan Volunteer Air Force. He was a flight-sergeant in the volunteers, and controlled a ground crew who were busy assembling aircraft.

He told us that two hundred and eighty Hurricanes had arrived that week, but that the personnel necessary to assemble them were still on the way. The news was cheering, and when we went to bed we felt much better, owing to the veteran's optimism and confidence.

Something must have gone wrong if his story was true. Either the men who were to assemble the craft never turned up, or there were insufficient pilots to use them. If two hundred and eighty Hurricanes had been available for use we should have had no difficulty in tackling the Japanese air forces whose relative small numbers had hitherto enjoyed supremacy in the air.

On the following morning we left early for Johore, and reported once more at the Johore P.W.D. Office. There we learned that our old 'Circus' had been broken up, its various members having been deployed to separate districts on special jobs. Boardman was to work in a formerly Japanese-owned rubber estate at Kulai, where a satellite landing-ground was being made. I was given instructions to take over the whole road running from Johore Bharu along the east coast to the edge of the district, but first to carry out a number of jobs in the town in collaboration with an assistant engineer named Winston.

There had been a considerable influx of people from Kuala Lumpur during our absence, and Boardman and I were at a loss to find room for

the night. We were sent along to a deserted Police officer's quarters, but when we arrived we found that there was no bedding, and no cooking could be done on the premises. We were too busy moving in to worry about food, however, and a raw pineapple sufficed for the rest of the day.

The following day was a Sunday, and Boardman left for Kulai. Winston had arranged to put me in his quarters, and I moved my goods and chattels once again, wondering if, at last, I could settle down awhile.

As we sat in Winston's lounge, with the sun fading after a hot and tiring day, we talked of the war. Winston was optimistic, but I was struck with his lack of information as to the events in the north. He told me that the place was packed with Australians and that their Commander-in-Chief, Gordon Bennett, had expressed great confidence that they would hold the enemy. They had not yet gone into battle, but would do so when the Japanese reached the Johore borders.

I wrote a long letter home assuring my family that we were going to make a stand. We were so compressed into the heel of the sock that resistance was stiffening. And I firmly believed that what I wrote would be true.

Monday was spent in a tour of inspection with Winston, to enable me to absorb the geography of the district. It was during this day that I saw my first air battle in Malaya.

It was a great fight. The Japanese aircraft had come for Singapore, and had been met over the Straits of Johore. Anti-aircraft fire kept the planes at a high level, and R.A.F. fighters engaged them from above. We had a fine view from the Low Road, which runs along the coast from the town towards the west. The silvery shapes wound and twisted in the bright sunlight, and short bursts of their machine-guns could be heard above the roar of power-dives and the noise of bursting shells. One plane crashed and its twin engines coiled out a twisted pattern of smoke as it fell. About ten minutes later the enemy aircraft made off.

After the distressing absence of air defence in the north the spectacle was cheering, and I felt that here, at last, we should be able to hold out until more aid came from home. The Australian fighting forces, as yet untried in Malaya, were to go into action when the enemy reached the Johore border. Our forces had salvaged almost everything there was to salvage right along the road, had been pushed down into the southern point of the peninsula, and were now compressed into a small, solid block.

On Tuesday morning Winston took me in his car to make inspection of works along the road to Kulai. The heavy rains of the previous night had made him anxious about certain weak bridges and spots in the road where slips might occur.

As we approached the Lee Pineapple Factory, and the site of a large road improvement works, we observed that the river had swollen and water had inundated the low land on each bank. The road was covered by about two inches of water for a quarter of a mile. We ran on to Kulai and had some work to do there for an hour or so.

When we turned back we found that the road was blocked with army and private vehicles. It was half an hour before we reached the pineapple factory again, and a shocking sight met our eyes.

In the short time we had been away the river had risen three feet.

The *kampung* houses on either side of the road were flooded to the eaves, and the road itself was invisible for nearly half a mile. A long bridge which spanned the normal river course was out of sight except for the top half of its parapet railing. A torrent was running across the carriageway beyond the bridge. Chinese women, with their children, were crying out from the flooded areas, hens were squatting in bushes, and banana trees were swaying and finally toppling and floating away under the flow.

There had been a gun-nest at one end of the bridge, and the soldiers had salvaged their gun, placed it on safe ground, and were organizing a party to do rescue work. They tied a long rope from the bridge rails to a tree near the marooned dwellings, and one of their number swam to the rescue of the old men, women, and children, supporting each with one arm as he struggled against the current with the other. He would arrive at the rope in a state of exhaustion, pull himself and his charge along to safety, rest awhile in the water, and then go back for the next.

It was pitiful to see old Chinese panting and moaning as they were pulled on to dry land, gleaming moist like river rats, their black sateen slacks and overshirts clinging to their skin. Children were helped ashore, gasping and naked, pale and cold. Young women clung to babes in arms as they clutched at the life-line.

The method was repeated on the upstream side of the road, and the boy who swam out was on the verge of collapse when he had succeeded in beating the current and had tied the rope fast. Young Chinese went in to help the soldiers, and one swam back to safety—pushing before him a naked infant in a tin bath. When the job was done the soldiers were exhausted, and shivering in their wet clothes. A sorry group of limp figures sat or lay on the grass, with teeth chattering and faces white and sick.

I don't know how many lives were saved by the handful of soldiers that morning; the job they had done would never be recorded.

In the meantime Winston and I had been busy and had collected a big gang of P.W.D. coolies and casuals. An avenue of men was formed, standing on the roadside to show the lorry drivers where the carriageway was. Only the larger vehicles could proceed unaided, for the deep water choked the engines of the smaller cars and vans, and the strong cross current pushed them off the road. We had to tow by hand or tie up to a lorry and push.

One Australian Red Cross ambulance attempted to cross and was swept off the road, finishing half-way down the bank at a dangerous angle. We carried the sick and wounded men on our backs to safety, and pulled the van back to the road.

Every vehicle was in difficulties at some time or another, and many had been bogged and extricated before reaching dry road. One huge truck was so badly tipped over the edge of the bank at a bend that it had to be left until the flood subsided.

The flood had begun to fall away by noon, and at two or three o'clock the worst was over, and vehicles could proceed in safety. A few people had been drowned in the *kampung* dwellings.

Winston left me in the afternoon, and I stayed until I was sure that the

situation was in hand. Then it was necessary to find a vehicle which would give me a lift into town, and I walked out of the flood waters to the dry road, my sodden shoes making a great sucking noise at every step, and my cotton stockings dragging over my heels. Three lorries were stopped by the roadside, and I walked up to the stationary convoy to beg a ride.

A young Indian—he could not have been more than eighteen years of age—was tinkering with the engine of the foremost vehicle. A middle-aged Asiatic was helping him to investigate the trouble. As I approached, they turned towards me, and I noticed how dirty, tired, and dishevelled they were.

"Anything wrong?" I asked.

"Bit of engine trouble," was the reply; "I think she's running too hot."

I examined the engine and found that it was a Chevrolet, the same make as my car. I suggested that we examine the plugs, and we removed them to find that they were very dirty and burnt short. After scraping them with a penknife and closing the points a little we tried the engine, and it started without any trouble.

My request for a lift into town was met with an invitation to accompany the older man in his small car, which was standing some distance up the road. As we walked towards the saloon I asked the Asiatic how far they had come that day.

"We've come from Muar," he informed me.

"Had any trouble there?" I asked.

"Yes; these boys are my pupils, and we're all in the M.A.S.," he replied. "We've had a nasty week-end."

He went on to describe their experiences. The Medical Auxiliary Service, a voluntary organization trained by the Medical Service, had been tested to the full in the heavy air raids preceding the evacuation. Casualties had been heavy, and the First Aid Posts had been severely taxed.

"But it was worse yesterday," he said. "We had to collect and bury the dead."

My stomach turned with horror as he told me how those youths had picked up the dead, piled them in their three lorries, and taken them to an open space. There they had dug communal graves and disposed of their grim burdens.

"They've never done anything like this before," the schoolmaster explained. "It's wonderful how they've stuck it."

I asked him what was his next move. He didn't know; but when he asked the boys they said they would evacuate their lorries and medical equipment and take whatever jobs they were given to do in Singapore. To do this they had had to leave their homes without guarantee that they could ever return.

On the following morning the State Engineer took me to the village of Ulu Tiram, at the beginning of the 14th mile up the East Road which leads to Kota Tinggi and Mersing. The river there had washed behind the abutments of a reinforced concrete bridge and undermined the foundations, with the result that the bridge had broken its back and had fallen

into the river, leaving a gap in the road sixty feet long. Damage had also been done to a timber bridge across the same river in an adjoining rubber estate, and only comparatively light traffic could negotiate the wooden ramps which had been laid by the A.I.F. on the previous afternoon.

My job was to repair the timber bridge so that the estate road could be used as a detour, and to construct a new bridge across the gap in the main road. The ramps must not be removed until the new bridge was ready, and traffic was not to be held up. I had to find my own materials, and the only labour force available was that which could be borrowed from near-by estates.

After taking a few rough measurements I returned to the office and made inquiries as to timber or steel and ironmongery for the job. The only thing to do, I discovered, was to run round in my car, finding what I could and somehow designing the bridge to fit the materials available.

Five miles along the West Road I found some short ends of rolled steel joists, at the P.W.D. store were small timber sections, two miles along the Kota Tinggi road I saw two long pieces of R.S.J. lying by the side of the road, and from the Timber Controller I learned that two sawmills at Kota Tinggi had stocks of large timbers. When I went home at dusk I was wondering if I should ever manage to do the job.

That night I sat with my notes and designed a strange bridge of an odd mixture of steel and wood; steel of varying sizes and wood of different sizes and strength.

The next problem was to obtain transport for the scattered materials. On Winston's suggestion I rang up the Customs at the entrance to the Causeway, and arranged for them to stop the first empty six-wheeler timber wagon which went past in the morning.

On the following day a wagon was duly requisitioned and the Chinese driver and his mate were very willing to help when I had explained the job. The steel and timber had been dumped on the site before eleven o'clock. The District Engineer gave me the services of a lad of twenty named Jo Cavallo, a brown-skinned youth of Portuguese origin who had just evacuated from Malacca.

I explained the scheme to Cavallo and borrowed two Chinese carpenters and some coolies from the nearest estate. When I left for Kota Tinggi on the following day many of the timbers were cut and sole plates for the intermediate trestles had been set out and fixed.

The Lee Sawmills and the sawmill at Kota Tinggi had not quite the timber I had hoped, but I amended my design on the job and took what they could give me. They agreed to deliver that afternoon onwards until the order was complete.

When I returned from Kota Tinggi at noon the estate bridge had been repaired and could take light traffic. I got in touch with another estate and was lucky to get two more carpenters. The system of payment was easy: I had been given a fat wad of one-dollar bills, and a free hand as to the wages I should pay. The thing that mattered was to get the job done, and I talked it over with the Chinese. They worked from 7 a.m. until 6 p.m., with half an hour for a meal, and they received three dollars a day. For every carpenter they brought on the job I gave five dollars to the man who brought him.

I had no trouble with the men; they knew the work was urgent, and they toiled like slaves. Japanese aircraft went over daily, and on the first occasion, when the coolies ran into the rubber, I called them back and told them I should give them the word when to take cover. They were content, and after that stayed on the job.

Our days were long. Every morning I had to be at the workshop at 6 to collect nails or ironwork which had been ordered the day before, and then I stood over the job until noon, back to town for a meal and a visit to the office with vouchers for the timber bought, or for more money, then on to the job again, leaving at dusk.

At noon on the third day the traffic was going over the bridge, but we still had to nail in the dog-spikes and cleats, fix a kerb and erect railings to keep the traffic away from the remaining width of the road which was not bridged. We removed the ramps which the A.I.F. had laid down, and widened the bridge another two feet, making it ten feet.

At ten o'clock on the fourth day a young artillery captain stopped to ask me the way to Lee Sawmills. I explained that it was a good way up the road. He looked so distressed that I asked if I could help him.

He had disembarked two days previously and had to go into action that night at Batu Pahat. He wanted some bridging planks to carry his guns over the wide side drains and ditches. I had planks and nails and ironwork, just enough to spare, and I promised to have them ready by four o'clock.

When he returned with his lorry at four, and picked up the six gangways, we had a chat about the way things were going in the north. He told me to listen for the news about Batu Pahat, and I should know how he was going on.

I have often wondered what happened to him.

I was returning from the job as the sun was going down, when a car with a familiar number-plate attracted my attention. I looked inside the saloon as it was passing and recognized Horsley, my old chief. He was peering into my car, for he had recognized the Perak numbering, and we both sounded our horns simultaneously, pulling to a standstill a few yards apart. I got out and hurried up the road to greet the tough little Australian as he opened his car-door.

We met in the middle of the road and stopped dead. Suddenly I realized that we had nothing to talk about. We were so glad to see each other that impulse had made us stop.

I never remember Horsley shaking hands with me, even on the first day we met. He was not demonstrative, but rather the reverse. In fact, his off-hand and gruff manner had caused me to misjudge him at our first meeting.

But here we were, blocking the road, grinning at each other like two school kids, ashamed of our show of pleasure at meeting, embarrassed by our involuntary demonstration.

Horsley spoke first.

"Hello, bo'," was all he could muster.

I laughed and asked how he was. Ignoring my inquiry, Horsley pointed to my shoulder, and said.

"Why are you only wearing one pip? Didn't you know you'd been gazetted lieutenant?"

"No, why's that?" I asked, and Horsley unfolded the story. All the P.W.D. officers were now to have commissions, and our old 'circus' members, the original nine, had been re-gazetted one rank higher.

Horsley was amused, and made scathing comments on certain of our colleagues who would be given ranks. Of course, the thing was a joke now, for there were over a hundred P.W.D. engineers crowded into a small area, with no coolies, no jobs to do, but a beautiful show of bright new crowns and pips.

"Where are you staying, bo'?" Horsley asked.

I told him that I was living with Winston and asked him to come in for a chat one evening. He said he might even come to stay, for he had only that day moved into Johore Bahru from Batu Pahat district.

He came that night and slept on a mattress on the tiled floor of my room, refusing to accept the offer of my bed.

We did not see much of each other after that, for we arose early each morning and returned in time for dinner at night. The only thought was to get to bed after the meal, and we fell asleep as soon as our heads touched the pillows. Horsley told me that he was engaged on the confiscation of boats up the river, and went out daily with a naval officer in a powerful launch, picking up the river craft and towing them to the jetty. He was tired, bored, impatient at the job he was doing, and his remarks on the British Navy were strong and to the point, though not, I felt, entirely justified. He was interested in my story of the bridge, and each night he asked me about its progress. But not as he used to do when he was my chief in Kuala Kangsar; a month of war had closed the gap of seniority and the twenty years between our ages.

The bridge was finished a few days later, and in the meantime the traffic had increased considerably. Truckloads of Australian troops were making for the Mersing front, and there was a steady flow in both directions. Cattle trucks were numerous, going towards Johore full and returning to collect more beasts. The trek of evacuees had begun, and men on bicycles were making towards Johore laden with bedding and pans.

The Chinese youths of the village held a demonstration and procession, and I was told that their banners said: 'Give us the weapons and we can fight the Japanese'. They knew what it would mean to them if their country was taken out of British hands. Unfortunately it was too late then.

Landslides had occurred along the road, and the side tables were churned up owing to the inadequate width of the carriage-way. I was given a number of lorries and had to clear the slips and fill the material into the soft places along the road. The estate road, too, was showing signs of wear, and we spent a few days with a small gang on that. The next three or four days were occupied with these odd jobs, a bit here and a bit there, everything we could to keep the roads clear for the convoys.

On 28th January we were told that a withdrawal was to be made across the Causeway. The first job was to dump broken stone along the road at points where it could be used should intensive bombing take

place. For one hectic day I was clearing the tools away from the bridge job, stopping lorries and filling them up with stone, and paying off coolies. The next day I made my last trip to Ulu Tiram with rice for the men in the P.W.D. lines. We had not much to spare, one bag for four men. I emphasized the need for economy to the Malay overseers, and they promised to distribute a small initial ration first, then hide the rest.

The Malay Police Force had been disbanded, and I could not help the feeling of dismay that this well-equipped organization should have proved so futile when most needed. At every town, when evacuation began, the Police had been paid off, and their arms and kit evacuated. In a few hours the organization of many years was thrown away, and the Malay constables returned to their *kampongs*.

Asiatic troops occupied the police station and shops in the town. The inhabitants had disappeared.

It was my responsibility to see that nothing of value was left. A steam-roller and a motor-roller were abandoned on the road, the drivers having taken fright and fled, and arrangements were made for the R.N.Z.A.F. to drive them down to Singapore. A Malay overseer and I walked to a P.W.D. quarry, satisfied ourselves that the engine and crusher had been smashed beyond use, and broke open the magazines with a crowbar. They contained a small stock of gelignite and fuses, and I put them in my car.

I came down the road to the bridge where a party of engineers was making preparations for its demolition. I gave them the explosives and drove on, sad at the thought that my new work should be destroyed when only a few days old, but satisfied that it had done what was required of it in carrying the guns and the men up to the front and back to safety.

A Tamil in the Coolie Lines at the 11th mile had appealed to me for milk for his wife's baby, for all the cattle had disappeared. I had managed to get six tins for him in the town, and I called in to give them to him. As I was talking to the overseer a small car drew up, and a Eurasian got out and begged a glass of water. He was dressed in the uniform of the L.D.C., the Home Guard of Malaya.

I was curious, for the car was heading north towards the front. I asked him where he was going, and walked to the car to see what he had inside. There was another man, and two women. They were all young, and all Eurasian. The girls were strikingly beautiful, with black hair and full mouths and figures, rich complexions and large dark eyes. The man could have been taken for an Englishman until he spoke, when his inflexion and the pronunciation of certain words showed his caste.

I pointed out that it was unwise to proceed farther north, and they told me that they were going to occupy a manager's deserted bungalow on a near-by rubber estate.

"How many are there of you?" I asked.

"Sixty"; replied the man in uniform. "We have come from Malacca, and we cannot hope to get in anywhere in Singapore; we are tired of running away."

They were well educated and they all talked reasonably. It was no use. They were Eurasians, not accepted in European society, unable by

their birth to live as coolies; in fact, as William Brawn had once said, they were neither one thing nor the other. They spoke our language, but were not of us in any other way. As I looked at the girls, at the two men who were quite capable of working and living and fighting for us, I felt that there was something very sadly wrong with our attitude.

Who started this attitude in the first place? I am sure it was not a point of Government policy at any time. Perhaps the women in some place or other a long time ago found that the Eurasian girls were more attractive in the tropics than they, and started a campaign against them. Perhaps some snob, at one time, had had ideas about racial purity, a strange thing if that was so, for we British are very much a mixture ourselves. And we are horrified at the tales of Germany's Pure Aryan Policy. Is not mental cruelty a crime?

I am not inclined, I am sure, to favour any one race more than another. I am English, born in England of English parents, and am thankful that in England the Eurasian is accepted as a social equal, that an Asiatic receives the same privileges as we, and that his race is respected. Coming to the East for the first time, and able to judge as an impartial outsider, I was appalled at the attitude of the English Malaysians to these people; and most of all to the Eurasians, who use our tongue and have our habits.

I am convinced that not by this attitude was the Empire built up, not by distinction between man and man will it be regained, nor by these egotists can it ever be strengthened.

The car went on and I wondered whether or not I myself was foolish to keep running away. I cursed myself, realizing where my duty lay, and drove off.

I had not gone very far when I saw a crowd of Chinese and Tamils, some running, some staggering under the burden of large kerosene tins filled with some heavy substance. Patches of white were on the road, where tins had burst, spilling their contents. It was sugar.

Out of idle curiosity I ran my car into the yard where the crowd was. There I met two Europeans who told me that a go-down had been opened to allow the people to take as much as they could. There were forty thousand bags of rice and forty thousand forty-pound tins of sugar. They had just twenty-four hours.

Too late—again.

I looked around me. Children were struggling to lift the heavy tins, aged Chinese were attempting to balance a tin at each end of their *pickuls*—the sticks used for carrying burdens across the shoulder. Old and young women were trying to pull the 180-lb. sacks of rice along the ground. Tamils were sweating with handcarts, young men were heaving tins of sugar on to the carriers of their bicycles.

The sight in the go-down was a revelation. Gleaming tins of sugar were piled ten feet high over hundreds of feet of the floor. Men and women alike were scrambling up the smooth stacks, gripping the top tins with frenzied fingers. Surely someone would get hurt, I thought. A mad impulse overcame me, and I went to an untouched stack and climbed up. For half an hour I was lowering the tins to the ground, and as fast as I released them they were snatched away. Cries of "*Tuan, tuan,*"

were rising in an insane crescendo all around me, and at last I took fright and ran away.

I dare not look at the two men who were in charge, standing coolly at the door. I was soaked through with perspiration, exhausted, and I got into the car and went home. Of course it was no use; perhaps one-tenth had been removed. The next day the rest would go up in smoke.

Early on the morning of the 30th January I packed everything into my car and left Winston's quarters for the workshop. The machinery had been put on lorries on the two previous days, and the remaining vehicles had to be loaded with tools, water fittings, axes, picks, and small apparatus. The Asiatic drivers had run away, and we were going to drive the lorries ourselves, with a few of the R.N.Z.A.F. to help us.

We worked for two hours or so, doing most of the loading ourselves, with but a handful of the remaining faithful Tamil coolies to lend a hand.

Jo Cavallo, who had asked to come with us, was given Winston's car to drive to Singapore, and I had to lead him in mine. We had just set off when the Japanese bombers appeared. They were bombing the road to the Causeway. Anti-aircraft shells were bursting overhead, and we had to take cover. The raid was the first on our side of the Causeway, and it was obvious that they intended to destroy all they could to hamper the retreat.

After half an hour I led the way down the road. Wires and poles were scattered everywhere, earth and bits of brick were thrown in the road, a dispatch rider was stretched out on the grass with his hat over his face. But the road was almost undamaged. A few craters—four or five feet in diameter—had been made near the bridge which carries the road into the town.

We drove on slowly and passed through the guards to the Causeway. This was the last step; surely Singapore would hold out. I said good-bye to the mainland and passed along the strip of solid granite on to the Island.

CHAPTER X

AS I WENT along Bukit Timah road I saw the guns which pointed to the Causeway, and the troops being mustered for the last stand. The side of the road was littered with vehicles of all types, from steam-rollers and tractors to army cars. We had not far to go, for I was reporting to the Rural Board Depot for instructions.

The depot was crammed with lorries and tools and materials from all parts of Malaya. These were to be issued to the various construction units of the Australian Engineers and the Indian Royal Engineers, with which we were to work.

Four of us were instructed to report to Major Bhagat of the Indian Royal Engineers, whose brother was the first Indian V.C. His unit was stationed at Jurong village, half-way along the road which runs from Bukit Timah Road to the west side of the Island.

Major Bhagat outlined the work we had to do. Three rough roads were to be formed between Jurong Road and Bukit Panjang Road, which ran parallel with Jurong Road to the north. The roads were to feed various artillery units and to act as detours should damage occur to either of the main routes. We had to find our own coolies and one lorry, and the other vehicles and tools would be supplied.

We returned to the depot, arranged for the lorry, filled up with petrol, and went to the quarters allocated to us.

My billet was situated in Ridley Park, and there were five other occupants, three of them architects, one an accountant, and one an engineer. One of the architects was a new man who had arrived in April, 1941, named Victor Smith. It was agreed that I should share a room with him.

When I was introduced to the men, their natural reaction to the name Bailey was 'Bill', which nickname remained with me for seven months.

The following morning, 31st January, we took three lorries to the Causeway end and picked up seventy-five Chinese coolies who had been working for a fortnight on demolition preparation works. We had to drive the vehicles ourselves, young Jo Cavallo was allowed to remain with me, and he was given a lorry; another engineer and myself driving the others. The Chinese were provided with Coolie Lines at the Field Company site, which was in the rubber behind Jurong village.

Work was started in the afternoon and I was engaged in carting broken stone, driving the lorry myself, with half a dozen Chinese on the back.

There is something about driving a big lorry along a rough road that has a thrill and gives a sort of boisterous pleasure. In spite of the heat, the dust and the smell of hot oil, my spirits rose, and I sang as I jostled in the cab. On several occasions I bounced out of the seat and struck my head on the roof, but as I was wearing a tin hat most of the time the result was merely a dull thud. The company of the Chinese, coolies though they were, gave me pleasure too, for I felt that I was beginning to understand their reactions and their mental make-up by working with them. Often we all went into a near-by coffee-house and I sat at the tables with them.

I remember that Grehan, the first P.W.D. man I met in Penang, had spoken on that first day of the 'P.W.R.'—the Prestige of the White Races, which he said was practically non-existent in the East. I also recollect that on more than one occasion I was warned that a European lost face if he stooped to manual work in front of Asiatics; that he must always maintain his dignity.

There is a dignity in toil. The common coolie who cuts the grass along the road is master of the art. The Chinese who sweats from dawn until dusk on his allotment produces the finest vegetables in Malaya. To this day only the Chinese in Malaya can grow tobacco successfully. My *sais*, who could only drive a car and keep it clean, moved me with profound respect as he polished the copper tubing and the casting of the engine, and flicked the dust from the body with his feather duster. My boy took a pride in his work, too, and delighted in the preparation of exquisite dishes with figures of birds and flowers worked in potato or

jelly or butter. What is more dignified than the way in which a Malay boatman stands in his small craft, propelling it soundlessly and without effort by means of a single oar?

The men who had to abandon their office desks in Malaya and take to washing their own clothes, preparing their own meals, or eating them in coffee-shops with Chinese and Tamils of the coolie class, loading and driving lorries, using a spade and cleaning their own cars, will tell you that in doing these tasks they lost no dignity. Rather, they acquired a new status in the eyes and minds of the Asiatics with whom they had thus come more closely in contact; for a worker despises a man who does not know how to use his hands and cannot bear to sweat a little for himself.

I knew many Europeans in Malaya who had built for themselves, over a period of years, a pedestal from which they looked down on the Asiatics who worked for them, autocratic, ignorant, and egotistical beings who were using their colour and false status to sugar their vanity. I wonder what they did when they were left alone, with no servants to scream at, no poor Chinese shopkeepers to wither with their tongue?

I also wonder how they will fare if they go back to Malaya, faced with the tremendous task of rebuilding the prestige which they themselves helped to destroy, the prestige which was driven out at the same time as our forces by the Japanese?

The day's work was finished and we drove towards home as night was falling, with its sudden transition from sunshine to darkness, so strange to a new-comer. There was no noise, and I could not suppress the feeling that the dead quietness was the lull before the storm.

The Causeway was blown up at the Johore end overnight, and the Island was cut off from the outside world, besieged by land, sea, and air. The Argyll and Sutherlands, who had fought all the way down the Peninsula, gathered together the handful of men that remained and formed the rearguard, piping the boys across to their last stronghold.

February 1st, 1942, the beginning of the Siege of Singapore, was unusually calm. In the morning I went into town to the bank and the office. The atmosphere was quiet, shopping was going on as usual, Raffles Hotel was as busy as ever—dinner and dance were continued almost to the end—and only the exceptionally crowded streets and stores told of the tremendous number of people on the Island, chiefly troops and evacuees, who were taking up all accommodation.

The L.D.C. was disbanded, but the Europeans still walked the streets in their uniforms. This organization, which had been intended to copy the English Home Guard, had disintegrated as each town was cleared before the Japanese advance. The money, organization, and materials spent on the Corps was a complete waste. Now the officers were wandering about the Island, redundant, their uniforms worthless.

Officers of the Police organizations, minus men, minus offices, minus authority, could be seen in the banks and the shops, passing time on as best they could.

The P.W.D. office was filled with civil engineers from all over the country, herded together, looking for work, superfluous. Only the youngest of us were sent to the rough-and-tumble jobs with the field

companies. One-time senior engineers, with salaries of over a thousand dollars a month, were engaged in spotting on the office roof.

As I was looking through the mail, hoping to catch the glimpse of a familiar handwriting, Horsley came to me. He greeted me warmly, and we stood talking for some time, comparing notes.

"And what are you doing now?" I asked.

"You'd never guess my next job," Horsley replied, and his look of disgust made me laugh. "I'm going to be a blooming bricklayer."

He explained that our former State Engineer was to be in charge, and a number of the engineers were to convert the P.W.D. Office garage into an air raid shelter by erecting blast walls.

I do not think the work was ever started, but, if it had, it would have been most expensive brickwork with bricklayers earning six to eight hundred dollars a month, and the foreman drawing over a thousand. All the workmen were qualified civil engineers and wore uniforms ranking from lieutenant to lieutenant-colonels.

I left the Office and picked up young Cavallo on the way to the Field Company's depot. My first task was to drive a Fordson tractor to the road job, and I viewed the vehicle with some misgiving. By the time I had started its stubborn engine with the cranking handle my shirt clung to my back, and perspiration ran down my knees into my stockings. The iron seat was burning hot from exposure to the fierce rays of the midday sun, and I settled myself very gingerly at the steering-wheel, wishing that my cotton shorts were made of thicker material.

There was no brake to the tractor, and when I came to road obstructions I had to let in the clutch and hope for the best. Then, careering along at a reckless speed, I made the most of the lengths of clear road, arriving safely at the work site.

Work was well in progress, and several new small culverts were already in position ready for the topping of stone and laterite, that peculiar deep-red, soft stone which will break up and spread so easily and sets so hard. A number of deposits of this material had been found near by, and we opened borrow pits on the site.

On the 2nd the gang was working on the road when the Japanese carried out a raid, twenty-seven bombers passing over our heads. The coolies were overcome with fright, but resumed work when the aircraft had passed on. It was obvious that we should get little work out of them if we allowed them to take cover every time a plane appeared, and we decided to face the risk and keep them on the job until we were sure that bombs would be dropped around us. The afternoon was clear of aircraft, and we continued without interruption.

I awoke on the morning of the 3rd to the sound of artillery. Our gunners were shelling the Japanese on the Johore coast-line. The sound gave us a feeling of security, and work went on in spite of another visit by the familiar twenty-seven bombers.

An Australian unit, with camp kitchens, settled in the estate through which one of our roads was passing, and we became friendly with them. I can recommend the tea brewed by the Australians on a camp kitchen.

Things still seemed to be more or less normal on the 4th, and our artillery was still hammering at the Johore coast-line. Work in the

morning was uninterrupted, although a large force of bombers passed over us and we could hear the dull crump of explosions somewhere in the town.

In the afternoon, however, as I was standing watching the men spreading laterite on a portion of the road near to its junction with Bukit Panjang Road, a thin metallic whistle cut the air just above my head, and a second later I heard a bang. The sound was new to me, and I listened again as the faint whisper was repeated; the explosion could be heard somewhere down the road, and a third whispering note was followed by another bang.

The laterite was finished, and I took the lorry down the road to fill it up again. I didn't get very far, for suddenly one of our Australian cook-house friends jumped from behind a tree and waved frantically for me to stop.

I had just stopped the engine when a loud, shrill whistle rent the air, and I ducked instinctively. As I did so there was a deafening crash, and the rubber trees shivered about a hundred yards in front of me. The coolies had taken cover in the roadside ditch, and I followed them. The whistle was very much louder and clearer now. We were being shelled, and I wondered if the next one would be for us.

After half an hour the shelling ceased and we clambered into the lorry and went down the road. Branches were ripped from the trees, and the torn trunks were weeping latex. The Australian cook-house had been in the middle of it, and the cooks came out of their trenches cursing and muddy.

There was more excitement when I arrived home in the evening. The bombs in the morning raid had dropped around Ridley Park, and one had made a crater in the garden twenty-five yards from the house. The damage done was one cracked drain and a buckled water-pipe. The crater was about ten feet in diameter and four feet deep. The house was not even splashed with mud.

Next door, a bomb had dropped nine feet from the baffle wall in front of a shelter formed in the bank of the lawn. Four men inside the shelter were deaf but unhurt. The wall, made of earth with timber sheeting, was knocked out of true and had opened up slightly at one end where it had taken most of the blast.

All through the evening the roll of artillery could be heard, and we went to bed with the sound of the distant guns still clamouring over the Island.

The 5th February was much the same as the previous day. Aircraft came over in the familiar twenty-seven formation, and it could be recognized when the bombs were going to drop, as the leading pilot gave a short burst on his machine-gun. Various theories were advanced by the more reliably informed, the one most favoured being that the Japanese were short of bomb-sights, and that only the leading bomber could take aim. The gun gave the signal for the aircraft following to release their loads, and probably one hundred and twenty to one hundred and fifty small bombs would drop at once.

We noticed that bombing to date had only occurred in the forenoon, and there were several explanations advanced. One was the prevalence

of electric storms, which made flying in the midday sun difficult, and the other was that the Japanese had not as many planes or bombs as they would have liked, and were conserving their materials. Whatever the real reason, it was certainly very comforting to know that once the morning had passed the remainder of the day would be free of raids.

On this particular occasion the aircraft were engaged over the spot where we were working; and I was driving a lorry along to a borrow pit, with a few men on the back, when there was an ear-splitting explosion immediately above the lorry, very low indeed. I stopped and ordered the men to run to the cover of the trees, for this was anti-aircraft shelling, and too near to be safe. Cavallo dived beneath the lorry and I ran under a tree as the splinters pattered on the dry earth around us. Twigs and leaves loosened and floated to the ground as the jagged bits of hot steel bedded in the branches.

The raid was over within half an hour and we saw a British fighter circle above our heads as the aircraft made off. There were so few of these that the sight of a solitary friendly plane was comforting.

Shelling was continued as on the previous day, but this time the projectiles were falling to the west of our position. I was able to see the path which the shells had followed in the sky, as their flight disturbed the heavy, humid air, and a few seconds after they had passed a thin curved wisp of vapour showed clearly the line of flight.

When we returned with the coolies to the depot we found that the car belonging to one of the engineers had been hit by splinters in several places. There were holes in the bonnet, and the radiator tube was cut open.

Affairs at the Mess were becoming difficult. The Chinese boys, not very good specimens at first, had changed their attitude as the bombing became more intensive. It is possible that the constant strain of the raids was beginning to tell on them, and they were rude and off-hand. The loss of prestige which was inevitable owing to the fight having gone against us was having its results, and we could get no service or attention whatever.

The six men, sharing a small house, spending their only leisure time in a dim, blacked-out and stuffy room, playing poker dice and trying to read or listen to the wireless, were tested to their utmost patience also. On one evening a mild discussion on Asiatics, and servants in particular, led to a heated argument in which one of our party lost his temper and had his attitude challenged by another. This led to trouble, and a threat of violence between them was only avoided by the advent of dinner. It was an embarrassing affair, and I felt the position keenly, being the youngest there by some years. The situation passed off, but it worried me and I thought that perhaps I ought to find another Mess.

I went into town on the morning of the 6th to attend to my financial business and collect mail from the P.W.D. Office. As no news had reached me regarding Alec Cockburn I made my way to Medical Hall, the dispensary of Grafton Laboratories, to see if it were possible to get any information as to his whereabouts. The manager was in and he told me that Alec had reached Singapore in safety and was stationed on the coast at Changi, on the east side of the Island. I hoped that the oppor-

tunity would come for me to visit my friend, but the manager did not know his unit or number, and the prospects of a meeting seemed very remote.

The bank was full on my arrival, all the up-country branches being represented at different tables in the overcrowded building. I met Harvey Ryves, and we had a long talk as we waited for our turn at the counter. He did not know what had happened to our mutual friends of Kuala Kangsar; and I felt sorry for this young man whose home had been broken up, whose Police personnel had been disbanded, and whose young wife had been evacuated. He was very cheerful, and I admired his spirit and great optimism in the face of the circumstances.

The sirens wailed their warning and we were ushered into the cellars of the bank. The place was packed with Malays, Chinese, Indians, and Europeans, men, women, and children, standing, sitting on the few chairs and benches, or squatting against the wall. In the air hung the smells of perfume, oil, perspiration, tobacco, and garlic—a powerful and nauseating odour which, added to the heat and the breathlessness, tended to produce a growing discomfort and feeling of enclosure. Nobody spoke; we were all listening for the 'All Clear', anxious to get out of the cell-like atmosphere and breathe fresh air again.

When the raid was over I was thankful to leave the town and make for the Rural Board Depot. Having collected some more money for coolies' payments there, I headed for Jurong Road. I had only reached the Ford works on Bukit Timah Road, however, when I was hailed by four soldiers, and stopped to pick them up.

They were Australians, and had been working in a unit repairing lorries and Bren-gun carriers in the workshops behind the Ford works. The bombs had fallen on their place, destroyed it and started a fire. They were muddy, torn, and breathless, and appreciated the cigarettes I was able to give them. They wanted to get to Base Depot, and I dropped them at the Jurong Road junction, where they could hail another car going into town.

The afternoon was quiet, and our work was almost finished. Guns and lorries were already using the three roads, and we spent the day in patching muddy places formed by their heavy wheels during the rain of the previous night.

When I arrived at the site with my coolies on the 7th I saw a number of lorries parked beneath the rubber. They had run in at night, and the men were having breakfast. The N.C.O. in charge of the unit told me that they intended to shell the Japanese gun position on the Johore coast, and asked me to dig trenches for his men in case the fire should be returned. We set to work and the trenches were finished by the time the guns were in position some fifty yards behind us.

The N.C.O. gave me the word to take cover and the two guns fired with a roar that almost lifted me out of my skin. The sensation of standing fifty yards in front of a gun when it fires is startling, to say the least. The guns fired again and again, brilliant red-orange flashes blinding me and the crash of the fire pounding my ear-drums. Then was silence, and the gunners ran forward and scrambled into the trenches with us. We waited for five, ten minutes for the Japanese to reply.

There was no reply. The N.C.O. observed with satisfaction that they must have got the b——s, and the gunners ran to their posts to dismantle the guns and move on.

The guns they had put out of action were apparently those which had first shelled the Island on the 4th, for no shells fell in our area after that day.

On the 8th I had occasion to go into the town again and was driving along a road in the south-west quarter when the siren wailed. The notice must have been short, for almost immediately the ack-ack started. I looked up to see the white puffs directly above my head, and I dived for the roadside drain, rather foolishly perhaps, as there was no overhead protection in the open trench. Splinters whistled down, burying themselves in the hard asphalt with a sound like a pebble dropping in mud, or bounced off the stone walls with a 'peng' as their flight was stopped.

Bombs were being dropped about half a mile away, possibly round about Fort Canning, and the raid lasted thirty minutes. I inspected my car, found that it had escaped injury, and drove off.

I was bound for the P.W.D. Office, which had been transferred from town to a large quarters on Mount Pleasant, and I turned into Stevens Road.

I was opposite the Tanglin Club when a loud screaming whistle rent the air above the noise of the car engine and terminated in a terrific crash which shook the ground and seemed to lift me from the seat. I pulled up sharply and was opening the door when another infernal scream pierced through my ears.

The explosion caught me half-way out of the car, and I am not sure to this day whether it was the blast or blind instinct that did it, but I was flat on the road before the noise had stopped. I scrambled to the roadside drain, thanking my lucky stars that every road had big ditches along its edge, and was there just in time for the next shell. The whistle was worse than the bang; out of the silence this mad shriek rose to a terrifying pitch, and it always seemed to be coming straight for you: then the shell burst somewhere behind, with a crash that made ears ring and the ground quiver.

Ten minutes later there was silence, and I decided that unless I was unlucky enough to catch one slap on the moving car it would be safer to get farther away. I was on my way in no time and reached the office without any further excitement.

The rest of the day was uneventful and we were able to carry on with our patching. We moved some of the men to Jurong Road and repaired the places where the constant heavy traffic had worn off the top surface or churned up the grass side-tables.

I was up and about early on the 9th and the rumble of artillery was louder and heavier on that morning than on any previous day. Things were warming up, I thought, as I got into my car and set off for Jurong Road. The time was 6.30, and the cool, fresh air told of light rain on the previous night.

I had only gone a mile up the road towards the depot when I saw a file of men walking, stumbling, dragging along the grass verge in the direction of Bukit Timah Road. Some were bootless, some shirtless,

and a few had not even trousers. One had a tommy-gun, very few had rifles, none had kit on their backs. They were covered in mud from head to foot, scratched and bleeding, exhausted, beaten.

The sight was disturbing to my peace of mind, and by the time I had arrived at the Field Company depot at Jurong Village I was asking myself what had happened; did it mean that the Japanese had landed? If so, how many? Were we dealing with them?

The scene at the depot was reassuring, for there were no outward signs of disturbance. A party of Indian Sappers was making land mines under the watchful eye of a sergeant, our coolies were awaiting our arrival, and all was quiet, orderly, and efficient.

But not for long. One lorry-load of Chinese went off to work and I was trying to get my rather troublesome lorry to start. Suddenly, out of nowhere, three Japanese aircraft flew overhead, not more than a hundred feet up. They were flying from the west, which they had never done before. A few seconds later we heard the rumbling of exploding bombs behind us. They were bombing the road.

The anti-aircraft shells were exploding overhead and I saw a British fighter roar up to engage the bombers. We sought shelter under the large rubber trees; there were no trenches, because the water table was very high and water appeared at about two feet down. The ugly particles of shell-casing hissed to earth, certain death if they caught a man on his head.

Jo Cavallo was near to me, and he crept across to my side, very frightened and restless. I asked him if he was all right, and he tried to grin, the plucky kid, and said that that was the first time he'd been scared. I didn't tell him my own feelings, gave him a cigarette, and we puffed away, waiting for the raid to finish. I suddenly thought of the Chinese in the first lorry who had gone to resume work down the road. Had they been hit?

The Japanese were determined to make full use of their bombs and bullets in that raid. Suddenly they changed their tactics, and, braving ack-ack and fighters, they dived from all directions, weaving mad, steep-sided cat's cradles over the road and the spot where we stood. One dived so low that we all thought that he had been hit and was falling. But a second later we heard the rattle of his guns, and soon he was up again over the trees, turning for another swoop.

For half an hour the planes dived and circled, roared down at us and let off deadly bursts of their machine-guns, or dropped bombs in the trees. The rubber estates were crowded with field and transport companies along both sides of the road, and I could imagine the havoc that was being wrought. The total force of enemy aircraft must have been fifty or so, and it seemed that they had come in on all sides, with the result that our anti-aircraft guns were faced with the problem of a large number of fast-moving targets, and our small force of fighters could only deal with single planes at scattered points.

We were standing amongst stacks of gelnite, gun-cotton, fuse, detonators, drums of oil and petrol, and all the paraphernalia of a first-class unit of Royal Engineers. There were tons of the stuff, dispersed as much as possible in the small area available, but even the most distant

stack of explosive was only fifty to sixty yards away. One fifty-pound bomb would have laid every tree flat and scorched the earth if it had struck a single stack.

This was the longest raid I had experienced, and the most thorough. An hour passed before the aircraft made off, and we breathed with relief. We could live another day.

When all was quiet again the lorry-load of coolies drove into the depot. The engineer with them said that they had only gone a few yards down the road when the raid started, and they took cover immediately.

A lorry came through the depot with a number of dirty, bleeding men on the back, and two inert figures stretched on boxes between them.

It was then that I was told what had happened. The Japanese had made a landing in force at a point on the south-west coast. All night they had been piling in, losing men heavily at first, but gradually gaining ground. The Australians had been pushed back to the edge of the rubber, and then the sniping began. A rifle is useless against a tommy-gun amongst trees, and the additional hazard of snipers was too much for the men who were trying to watch for the Japanese moving stealthily from point to point with the strategy which they had used all down Malaya's jungles and rubber plantations.

Work was abandoned for the day, for the Chinese were frightened, realizing that they were living and working at the most dangerous place on the Island.

I drove homewards, and was approaching Bukit Timah Road when I saw what it was the Japanese had tried to do. Half a mile short of Bukit Timah Road the A.I.F. had established its headquarters, and on that morning the area had been bombed and machine-gunned mercilessly. Craters lined the roadside, though surprisingly few were in the carriage-way. Earth and trees, wires and poles, stones, water, and debris were thrown on the road and round about.

Already a party of men was busy repairing the communications, and I threaded my way between the lorries and trees and treacherous coils of wire to the main road.

At the junction I picked up four Australians, one without shoes and socks, all hatless, two with rifles, two with hand-grenades stuck in their belts. I took them into town, where they wanted to pick up a vehicle going to the Base Depot.

In the afternoon I was sitting dejectedly awaiting a call for further orders when the telephone summoned me. It was the engineer who had been in charge of our quartet at the I.R.E. Depot. We were to try to get back up the road and take the Chinese out of danger.

I went to the P.W.D. workshop to get a lorry and met the other engineers. We filled up with petrol and I sat beside a colleague with a revolver cocked in my hand, not sure what we might meet on the way.

On arrival at the junction of Jurong Road we were stopped by a military policeman and warned not to go up the road. We informed him of our mission, and he was obliged to let us go through, but expressed doubt if we should be able to get as far as Jurong village.

The troops were still streaming down the road. The roadside camps

were evacuating Indian soldiers carrying their blankets and packs on their heads, lorries hastily loading up with petrol and stores, explosives and men. Bunches of dirty, wet, ragged Australians were gathered round lorries, receiving issues of bread and butter.

We reached the depot and gave the Chinese two minutes in which to get their *barang* and women and children out of the lines and into the lorry. They took no more than five minutes, and I believe that they had already packed their things before we came.

Night was falling and rain was pattering lightly on the miserable scene as we wound our way along the road to the workshop. We put the coolies into a vacant storeroom and went home.

At 6 p.m. the telephone rang again. All the men at the Mess were asked to report at a Government officer's quarters. We went along at once, and were told that we were to destroy—that night—a large stock of wines and spirits at Corbeck McGregor's store.

The night was pitch dark and it was necessary to work quickly, for if we were seen by the Asiatics they might rush the place and start a riot when they got hold of the liquor. We worked by the light of candles for the most part.

The store was up a winding flight of stairs and each case had to be carried down the street, opened, and the contents smashed over the sump on the drain outside.

There were thirty-seven thousand dozen bottles in that place alone.

I think that there were about seventy men working that night, ex-rubber planters and Government officers, some in Volunteer uniforms, some in the uniforms of the by now abandoned L.D.C. We formed a chain along the upper floor and rigged up a chute of planks, sliding the cases down to the gang of smashers below.

My first job was smashing. Two of us bent over the sump, with hammers and a hurricane lantern, and the burst cases were passed on from the store entrance. One by one the bottles were broken at the neck and emptied into the sump, then passed on to be packed roughly into their boxes and carried to the other side of the road, where they were stacked out of the way.

It was a back-aching job, breaking those bottles of gin and whisky and sherry, all the best Scotch and the worst Australian receiving the same treatment. After an hour I was intoxicated with the fumes and was moved to a spot where the air was clearer. I stood at the entrance with a crowbar and when a case was thrown at my feet I had to burst the wire which wrapped it, prise open the wooden lid and pass the box along to the men at the sump.

Half an hour was enough of that, and I was sent upstairs where the men were standing in a chain, passing on case after case in a weary line to the top of the stairs. I read the names on the boxes and thought of the thousands of headaches contained in them. We were all dripping with sweat in that crowded storeroom, and we blessed the man who had a brain wave and burst open a case of beer.

I don't know what time it was when we left. Very near to dawn. A small group had grown tired of the slow progress and had rigged up an ingenious tank out of tarpaulin, which they placed on the first floor,

and led a fire-hose downstairs to the drain. Their effort speeded the process a little, as they were able to work in a different part of the store. But when we looked round before we went home the impression we had made was very small indeed. The only thing we could say was that we had at least tried.

The telephone rang early next morning, the 10th February. I had to take a little food with me and go to the Head Office prepared to stay away from home for an indefinite period. The work was demolitions.

As I drove to the office I wondered sadly when I should be able again to do the work of an engineer, the real work that made the profession full of adventure and interest and sense of achievement—the work of building, of creating useful things out of bricks, stone, wood, and steel, making all the time monuments to the skill of the craftsman, the brains of the mathematician, the sacrifice of the research pioneer. For weeks I had been destroying rather than building, and the few constructive jobs I had done the last two months were shoddy and temporary.

On arrival at Mount Pleasant I met Jo Cavallo, and we had a long talk whilst awaiting orders. He knew, as well as I did, that it was the end of Singapore, but he showed no fear.

I remembered that he came from Malacca, and asked if he had ever heard of Robert Partridge. He knew him well, for Partridge had been at Kuala Lumpur Technical College with him, though Cavallo was a fresher when Partridge was leaving. Cavallo told me that Partridge had reported to the P.W.D. at Malacca for duty, and up till the arrival of the Japanese had been working on the design and construction of Civil Defence works. When the enemy was at the door, once again Partridge had had to make up his mind about staying behind or evacuating. He had decided to stay, for his girl was there, and there were no prospects in Singapore.

It was heartening to hear that Partridge had kept his promise of loyalty to the Department. I well understood his desire to stay and protect those he loved.

The conversation reminded me about Brawn and I inquired about him amongst the other engineers. I was told that my former workshop foreman had been for some time with the District Officer of Kuala Kangsar, and had next reported at Kuala Lumpur Factory. There he had remained until the town was evacuated, and had gone on to Singapore, where he was then working.

So I had been to the workshop on the previous day and had missed seeing Brawn. I resolved to try to see him on the next day, if only to thank him for his loyalty to our friendship and the Department.

My orders came through: I was to proceed to the workshop of United Engineers, where Chinese coolies armed with sledge-hammers would commence the destruction of plant and machinery. After that I was to go to the slipways and boat-yards of Thornycroft's and United Engineers and burn the boats.

An engineer named Laffan was to work with me, and we sat on a camp-bed making our plans whilst the Asiatic mechanics and fitters were paid off.

"Well, old man, it's Formosa for us," said Laffan. I looked at him

sharply, for he had a reputation for almost irritating cheerfulness—he was famous for his loud laugh. But he was far from cheerful at the moment.

"What's the position?" I asked. "Does this mean we're packing in?"

"Just as soon as we can finish smashing the place up," he replied. "We've been told to smash all we can, and they'll probably surrender on Thursday."

We talked quietly for a time, and I asked Laffan if his young wife and children were safely away. He said they were, and then he made a statement which, as it came from a fairly young, married man, will live for a long time in my memory.

"It's not so bad for such as myself," he said. "I'm not so young as I was, and in any case I've been in the country long enough to get a decent balance in the bank at home. But it's worse for you boys, who've only been out a year or so. You've spent all your cash, probably, in getting out here; and you've started with high ideas and lots of enthusiasm. Now it's gone, and you haven't even a wife to look after things for you whilst you're a prisoner of war. I've got in my service for a pension, you've not even been put on the permanent establishment."

The last of United Engineers' employees left the building, and our Chinese wrecking-gang arrived. We entered the workshop.

Everything was just as if the place had closed for the week-end. Huge lathes and drilling-machines stood idle, with oil-cans and rags precisely as the operators had left them, and shining curly turnings lay on the ledges and round the bases of the machines. Hammers and spanners and gauges were on the benches. I remembered hearing that Australia was crying out for machine tools.

I looked at Laffan in dismay. He said not a word, but walked to a lathe and pointed to its gears, beckoning to a coolie to bring his sledge-hammer. I went to another machine, then another, and another, and soon the air was a din of ringing steel as the heavy sledges struck at the fine machinery, wrecking the castings and bending or cracking the shafts and spindles, the bushes and bearings.

I hope that never again shall I be required to commit such a terrible act of sabotage as that which I did at the United Engineers. Millions of dollars' worth of beautiful precision machinery was ruined under the blows of the sledges. One of the staff of the company came storming to me and asked me why I was committing this crime. The poor fellow was overwrought and I could sympathize with his distress at seeing the place smashed up. He said that he preferred to leave the machines to the Japanese rather than witness their destruction, but I pointed out that I was merely doing my duty and suggested that he should go away where he could not see the painful sight.

When we had ruined as much as we could at the works, I took the coolies in a lorry to the slipways, carrying with me petrol and oil to start the fires. A senior member of the department indicated the jobs I had to do, and left me to it.

During our reconnaissance we found that people were still living in the buildings around the yards, and it was impossible to fire the boats

until we had moved them to safety. There was a great deal of work for the sledge-hammers, however, and we started on the lathes and other machines.

Two or three ratings who had survived the sinking of the *Prince of Wales* were hanging around the Thornycroft Slipway, awaiting the departure of a mine-sweeper. There were also three or four gunners from an anti-aircraft unit which was defending the aerodrome near by. Their feeling of abandonment and resignation to their fate was apparent; they had been drinking beer until they were not quite under control. I sympathized with these dirty, tired, inebriated men, and gave them a sledge-hammer with which to let off a little steam. They smashed unsteadily at the machinery, and one lad said that he would put a shell through the workshop roof from the gun if I wished. Discretion made me refuse the offer, though it would have saved us time and energy.

A beautiful Napier engine, painted white, was lying on the side of the slipway, together with a number of brand new Thornycroft engines. One of the latter was still in its crate, and another had just had the crate demolished round it. They were to have been installed in some new 75-ft Naval Patrol launches which were almost completed in the sheds. The sailors smashed at the castings and the electrical apparatus until they reeled and the engines were wrecked.

The job was done except for the burning of the boats, and I put the coolies on the lorry and took them home.

My mind was in a turmoil from the events of the day. The thought of the damage I had done weighed heavy on me, and the fact that it was done under orders was little comfort. The situation certainly was serious if we had no time to remove that valuable machinery. Then I began to consider my own position; no arrangements had been made and no orders issued as far as I was aware, regarding our evacuation.

The others at the Mess were very quiet and we were all thinking the same thing; were we supposed to stay on or had we to get out? We knew nothing about boats, and none of us had any instructions.

I suggested that, as I was working at the Slipway on the morrow, they should go down with me to see what could be arranged for our escape. There was a small boat, about a fourteen-footer, almost completed, with a petrol engine partly fitted, and perhaps we could finish the installation and get it to run.

We agreed that it might be possible to reach Sumatra in six days, and we worked out the minimum requirements of food and drink and fuel. That left little space for six men and their baggage, so it was decided that only the bare minimum of clothing should be taken.

The night was disturbed many times by the explosions of Japanese shells, and British guns were firing all the time from positions near the house. Yet somehow we managed to snatch a little sleep and awoke at four o'clock on the following morning. As I dressed I could hear the crackle of machine-guns and the sound of rifle fire. From the noise of the field-guns I could tell that they had retreated overnight and were firing over the house.

I packed a few things in my kit-bag, including a magnetic surveying dial and pencil and ruler for navigation purposes. One of the architects

tore the bottom off a map of Singapore which showed the surrounding islands and about half of the sea between the Island and Sumatra. We had no idea where the minefields were, but we had to risk that.

We went to the Slipway in two cars at five o'clock. The tractors were at work trying to patch up the airfield, and netted temporary hangars were erected on the roadside. Three or four fighter aircraft were anchored along the edge of the road. The flying-ground was littered with the wrecks of planes, and the few buildings were torn and splashed with earth. As a last effort the R.A.F. had decided to take off along the road.

I had still no orders about the burning of the boats, and I rang up as soon as I thought someone might be there. A senior engineer answered.

"I'm at the Slipway," I said. "Have I to carry on?"

"No; do nothing yet. Stay there and wait."

After an hour I called once more. Still no orders were given. In the meantime one of the party had been speaking to a Naval Reserve officer who was loading a small launch at the jetty, and there was need of hands to help get the craft to Batavia. They were leaving that afternoon.

The senior engineer in our party decided to go to Head Office and get the position clear. He had only been away a few minutes when I rang up again.

"Any orders about the firing?" I inquired.

"Not yet. The Navy wants us to wait," was the reply.

"What's the position? Is it a case of every man for himself, or have we to await instructions?"

"I think it's every man for himself, but things are a bit chaotic here. If you can make your own arrangements you'd better do so, but keep in touch with me as long as you can."

Once more I waited, until at last the senior engineer from the Mess came back with his news. The Director of Public Works had received permission from the Governor for the Department to evacuate. It was necessary for us to find our own way of getting out, but we had permission. The only order for me was to deny a tank containing thirty thousand gallons of petrol, and to wait a little longer in case word should come through for the burning of the boats.

I wanted to go back to the Mess to collect more clothes and things of sentimental value, but was told that the area had been cut off and we had no alternative but to get away as we were.

The other engineer and myself found the tank of petrol and opened the cocks to allow its contents to run into the trough around its base. Then we sat down, awaiting the afternoon.

The siren wailed the 'Alert', and we took cover in a stout-looking building until the raid was over. Apart from that the air was still, the street was dead, Tanjong Rhu was deserted.

Somebody came in to say that I definitely had not to touch the boat yards.

Our work in Malaya was finished. We boarded the *Panglima*, the 75-ft. launch, and were given orders as to our duties. I was to cook for

the sixteen people aboard, and we all were to take watches for aircraft and submarines.

The launch was one of three which had been in Thornycroft's, and she had had her engines dismantled. The mechanics had run off before the parts had been reassembled, and the *Panglima* was without means of locomotion. The other two launches were new, not quite finished, and only one could run its engines, and not fully at that. There was, in addition, an old hulk which had been used as a minesweeper, and had no engines. The four craft were to be towed to Batavia by a harbour tug.

The tug took us out into the middle of the harbour, and there we hove to and made fast the towlines, checking up and getting into line. The mine-sweeper was the first in tow and the three launches followed.

I looked behind at the Island. Never do that when you have come to love a place. I shall never do it again myself. I hurried down into the galley to make some coffee.

CHAPTER XI

THE TUG WAS jockeying into position at 3.30 when Japanese aircraft came over. We didn't see them approach and the first we knew about it was when the water shuddered; huge sprays of brine leaped into the air, and a series of terrifying explosions resounded across the harbour. The small launch rocked and creaked and I was thrown against the bulkhead in the tiny galley.

The raid ended as abruptly as it had begun. A few craft were foundering round about us and a large junk had a heavy list, but apparently we were untouched. One of the ratings shouted: "Get a blinkin' move on!" And at last we were on our way.

I looked around my small galley. My principal qualification for the post of cook was that I knew how to work a Primus stove, of which there were four. There was plenty of good food, enough for a month, and a surprising variety. Victor Smith helped me to keep the stoves going, and I set to work to prepare a meal.

The sixteen people on the launch included a woman, two middle-aged men who were not expected to do very much work, three officers, and a rating. The rest were men from various Government departments. It was easy to pick out the workers from the passengers after the first hour.

Late in the afternoon the mine-sweeper started to give trouble as we reached the open sea, and the captain of the tug decided to abandon her in order to save the other craft. We hove-to until the tow-lines had been cast off, the other vessels made fast, and the mine-sweeper drifted away astern. Our launch was the last of the line, and we could see the craft bobbing up and down like corks, pulling the lines taut and suddenly letting them fall into the sea, jerking forward and then seeming to stand still until the next wave lifted them up to pull on the lines again.

We were doing a steady four knots as evening fell and we took to our watches. There was to be a look-out in the bows, one amidships,

and one at the stern. The officers took watches at the helm. Lights were forbidden; and as there was only one cabin, which was occupied by the woman and an old gentleman who was stone deaf, smoking was out of the question. Most of the limited deck space was occupied by water barrels and drums.

Through the darkness the burning Island could be seen clearly, blood-red flames fringing the coast-line and bursting into sudden flashes of yellow light as another oil tank or building caught fire. It was like sailing away from Hell.

When the evening meal was over I sat in the stern of the launch, chin in hands, and gave myself to my thoughts.

Little more than a year before, I had stepped on the lovely island of Penang, full of hopes and ambition; for a year I had worked and studied and built a home ready for the end of my first tour, when I could marry and settle down to a career in the East. All my clothes were there, my books, my lecture notes. Every photograph I had ever taken or had been given was there, every gift I had received from childhood. The souvenirs which I was saving to take home were there, wrapped up in a parcel in my car. In the new car which I bought in Penang

I felt in my pockets and found the ignition key which habit had caused me to remove when I left my car. I tossed it overboard and it fell with a tiny splash into the sea.

Perhaps I could recover my bank balance when the war was over, I thought; that is, if the Japanese didn't destroy the records.

Sitting there in the cool night air, with no light in the sky save the dull red glow of burning Singapore, I revised my philosophy. Out of the chaos and the clamour came one single thought, a truth which changed my life. I realized that all those things that I had left behind meant nothing. They were the materials for living, the necessities and the luxuries, but they could be replaced. For I had something more precious than clothes and cars, books and gifts, and household goods. I had freedom, health, and strength, and the will to live.

And eight thousand miles away there was someone who was waiting for me, praying for me, thinking of my safe return. Pray God, I murmured inwardly, pray God I shall live to see that day.

By the time the middle watch had fallen due the launches were at the mercy of a heavy swell, and the cases in the galley and cabin began to slide about and bump against the bulkheads with a rhythmic thud, thud. It was a weird sensation to glide along noiselessly except for a steady bumping sound below, with no engines; lifting and dropping, rolling and pitching in the silent sea on a moonless night.

I was on the middle watch, and had to 'keep' amidships, patrolling on port and starboard sides within call of the watches forward and aft. The forward watch, the rating, asked me to tell the skipper that the tow-lines were surging, and I passed on the message. Examination in the darkness revealed very little, and when I was relieved there was apparently nothing to worry about.

An architect and I shared a blanket on the after-deck, with our feet pressed against the rail to prevent our sliding into the sea. We must have fallen asleep immediately.

We were jolted back into wakefulness by the skipper. The *Panglima* was bumping about, crockery was smashing below, the boards creaked.

"Get your kit together; the tub's going down and we shall have to get on to the forward launch," the captain shouted.

As we collected such things as we could in the darkness we learned that the launch was opening up at the bows under the strain of the tow, and the forward capstan was carrying away, pulling the timbers with it.

We hove to, and the forward launch was carried nearer to us by the swell. Someone threw a line, and it was hauled aboard and made fast.

"Have you got a heavy line there?" called the sub-lieutenant in charge of the forward launch.

"None except the four on the tow," was the skipper's reply.

"Then we'll have to pass you the anchor chain, we've nothing else."

They hitched the line to the chain, and it was hauled across and the end made fast to a bollard.

The distance between the vessels was variable, but about fifty feet. It was necessary to pull the anchor chain in until the space could be cleared with a jump by the woman and the older men. Six or seven of us took hands and hauled. There was no rail against which we could press, and the bows were about five feet across at the point where the chain was fastened.

For ten minutes we strained at the heavy chain, pulling in as quickly as possible when the launches lifted closer together, and holding on grimly when they fell away. The chain tore at our hands and jerked at our arms until it seemed that they would pull out of their sockets. As soon as we had gained a few links the rating tightened the chain on the bollard, and the vessels crept closer, closer. At one moment the sailor's hand was caught between the chain and the bollard, and we had to heave madly to keep the bight slack until he could free his hand.

At last we had managed to draw the vessels within a few feet of each other, and one of our men jumped across to lend a hand on the other craft, for there were only six on board, and they were exhausted. As he jumped the sea heaved under the two launches, and the gap which he had gauged for his leap widened two feet. He just managed to grab the corner post at the stern of the forward vessel as he fell, and he hung on there by one hand until the others could get down to grab his coat and shoulders.

We threw across our small articles of baggage, and took turns at the jump. The stern of the other launch was some six feet wide, and the whole beam was taken up by a small dinghy. We had to jump in pitch darkness from the narrow, heaving point of the bows, across the space, which varied from three to five feet, on to the dinghy. It was incredible that nobody was hurt. By five o'clock we had all jumped aboard, the last man had opened the *Panglima's* sea-cocks, and we cut her adrift to sink.

As the foundering launch fell away the lieutenant who had commanded her down Malaya's western coast-line, and who had tried so hard to keep her out of Japanese hands, called in farewell: "Well, good-bye, *Panglima*, by God!"

We awoke with the daylight on the Thursday morning and explored

the new launch. She was almost ready for the sea, the engines partly fixed, and all the fittings in position. A refrigerator had been installed and only needed food to put into it.

The captain of this vessel had had no time to get any food. All that we had was a little corned beef, a few tins of condensed milk, and about thirty small biscuits. There was also half a tin of jam. Apart from about three gallons of water, there was nothing to drink. We could not get food from the forward vessels unless we all hove to, and they had not much to spare as far as we knew. The *Panglima* had had enough on board for everybody.

We worked out the rations, and agreed on one meal per day, at noon. Each of the twenty-two people would receive one biscuit covered with corned beef, and a second biscuit plastered with jam. A quarter of a cupful of water with condensed milk of the same quantity was the daily drink allowed. If our journey took more than three days we should run out.

One of the men asked if the water tank was full, and the reply was that, even if it was, the pump didn't work. For an hour two men tried to repair it, but they failed, and sat down dejected and oily. Somebody had an idea just as they were giving it up as a bad job; there must be a manhole or cover plate somewhere, and we could loosen the bolts and bale the water out if there was any in the tank.

After a search we found a circular plate about a foot diameter, secured by means of a dozen bolts. Another search, and we found a car spanner which one of our Mess had brought with other tools for emergencies.

The bolts were new, screwed very tight, and there was little working space for the hands. At last the twelve bolts were loosened slightly, and the problem of the heaving sea had to be dealt with. Once we lifted the lid off the tank, the precious water would splash out to waste. Five or six men crouched round the tiny manhole, with two buckets and cans by their sides, and teacups in their hands.

I removed the bolts quickly and lifted the plate from the manhole. We all dipped the cups into the pure clear water which completely filled the tank, and for those few moments the launch was steady, not a drop being spilt on the deck. We had water enough and to spare.

Sumatra's coast could be seen by the afternoon, and we were making better speed owing to the lightened load. Things were looking much brighter and everyone cheered up when land was sighted.

In the distance, on our port quarter, we could see a large convoy, and we stood watching the vessels bear down on our slow-moving line of three. They drew up on our port beam, and were probably a quarter of a mile away, steaming steadily onwards towards Sumatra, accompanied by a cruiser and a destroyer, when Japanese aircraft appeared.

We lay in the scuppers and watched the bombers dive on the ships. The cruiser and destroyer opened fire on them, but still they came, diving in a steep attack, swooping low, and letting loose their bombs. We saw the cruiser disappear behind a vertical wall of spray, and thought that she had been hit. When the view cleared, however, there she was, firing away for all she was worth, and still steaming on. The convoy had broken up, and only the two warships stayed to give battle. The

destroyer was attacked, and she, too, was obscured for a moment, but came into view again when the spray cleared.

The aircraft must have used up their bombs, for they flew up and cruised round overhead. The warships made off, and it seemed that the destroyer had a starboard list as she steamed eastwards.

For ten breathless seconds we thought that the aircraft were going to let us have a few rounds from their machine-guns, for two of them dived low over us, and at the bottom of the turn they divided and flew off. We were glad that ours was a small, worthless vessel compared with those of the convoy, and had escaped notice.

In the meantime we had been steaming steadily on at four or five knots, and we came upon a Malay fisherman's house, standing on poles in the sea. The house was so far from land that we were interested, and examined the flimsy structure closely as we drew near.

Suddenly someone called out: "There are Europeans there!"

All eyes were turned more keenly to the shack standing on its four thin legs in the water. At the entrance, by the top of the *tangga*, were a number of figures in khaki. Near by was a launch, tied to the post at the front. The men waved to us, and after a few minutes two of them came across in the fisherman's *sampan*.

The tug and its charges had hove to, and whilst the two men were being brought aboard the tug skipper worked out his fuel and water balance. The position was serious, for the tug had used two-thirds of its bunkers and we had only come one-third of the way to the port where we hoped to refuel.

After a consultation the leaders of the line of vessels agreed to cut the launches adrift and ram them. We were told to carry the water-buckets, food, and our baggage across to the tug and then jump aboard.

Fortunately the sea was calm, and working in the daylight made the process fairly easy. After transferring the necessary materials, we dumped the forward two-pounder overboard, transferred the launches' machine-guns, and leaped down to the low deck of the tug.

On taking stock we found that there was ample food, but that the water was only just enough if used for drinking and cooking alone. There were forty-six people aboard, including the women and elderly men, the Naval officers and ratings, a number of engineers from Thornycrofts and United Engineers, and Government officers ranging from architects to accountants.

The sea-cocks were opened on the ill-fated launches, they were cut adrift and the tug rammed them with its bull-like nose. We steamed away.

I was put to work in the galley, assisting a young boy who had been on the *Prince of Wales*. He was a cheerful lad, of Welsh origin, and had an amusing habit of sniffing at every sentence, with a sniff into which he put all the eloquence of nostrils and lips and lungs. Had it been less sibilant and more vocal it could have been called a snort. He was obviously amused at having an older man as his scullion, and I enjoyed his antics, accent, and nasal punctuations. We became firm friends in little time.

The captain called all the younger men to the bridge and gave us a

clear statement on the position. Three ratings had been doing the stoking on the tug all the way from Singapore, and were all in. We should have to take our watches in the stokehold.

Snifty and I prepared a meal from tinned potatoes, tinned meat and vegetables, and soup. There was plenty of tea, coffee, and cocoa, and three jars of malted milk. The galley was about one yard square, with a coal oven across the far wall, and as we entered the steel-plated cubicle the hot air leapt out at us and brought beads of perspiration to our faces and arms.

The time for my watch in the stokehold came round, and I stripped to the waist and went below. It was my first experience of a stokehold, and I had no idea of the work to be done.

The tug, built for heavy work over short periods, had huge engines for its size, and only three fire-holes. On a continuous run the boilers were far too small for the cylinders, and a great deal of very hard work was required to maintain a pressure even of 100 lb. per square inch. Usually the gauge showed little more than 50 lb. The fires ate up the fuel as fast as it was shovelled in.

A pleasant New Zealander, a rating with stoking experience, was my mate, and he put me into the way. I can use a shovel with either hand, and that was very useful, but the rest I had to learn.

I think that the worst part of stoking is slicing, when the long chisel-pointed bar must be slid down between the firebars to loosen the slag and stir the fire. The bar is hot, and has to be pushed along to the back of the fire, so that at the end of the stroke the stoker's face is about a foot from the door.

No air came down the ventilator shafts, and within half an hour we were covered with perspiration, to which clung the fine dust from the ashes which we raked out of the ash-holes. We drank copiously from the bucket of dirty water provided, and went above for air once every hour.

When I came up from the watch I washed myself down as best I could in salt water, and then had to return to work in the galley. There was no place to sleep except the open deck, huddled on a flat coil of rope.

Nobody who stoked on the tug will want to stoke again across the Equator on a breathless day, with no chance of a decent bath and nowhere to sleep or cool down afterwards, no clean, cold water to drink and no food to build up his strength for the next watch.

As night fell we were doing six or seven knots, sailing down the coast of Sumatra, with our fuel running out.

The comradeship amongst us was wonderful, and did much to keep up our spirits. We sat round the cook's table listening to the lower deck's version of the sinking of the *Prince of Wales* as interpreted by the young Welshman. Our light-heartedness made even the captain's weak attempts at humorous interjections seem worthy of a laugh, and we thoroughly enjoyed the lad's stories and his pertinent retorts.

Mealtimes produced quips and jokes as the inevitable stew, made from bully beef and potatoes, was dished out on the assortment of enamel plates which had to be washed hurriedly for the next man, and delicious hot tea steamed out of pint mugs, a saturated solution of sugar and condensed milk. The older men were washers-up, and soon mastered

the art of filling a bucket with sea-water. This sounds a simple operation, but when the novice lowers the bucket on the rope, it bounces on the water and refuses to fill. When at last, at the risk of wrenching out his arm by the sudden pull of the current, the dancing thing fills itself, the next trick is to get the bucketful out of the water before it is struck on its side and emptied again.

The man who invents a soap which dissolves and makes lather just as easily in salt water as fresh water will reap the undying gratitude of the thousands of men who live on the sea. All we could produce was a greasy film which grated against our salt-soaked skins, to rub which was to create a sickly grey paste of soot, dirt, salt, and dead soap.

The following day was Friday the 13th. The superstitious amongst us were convinced that, if we were going to have any bad luck, that would be the day. Some super-pessimist worked out that we should be having another Friday the 13th in March.

In actual fact the day was almost uneventful. The captain called at Banka Island, lying off the north coast of Sumatra at its southern end, to ask for fuel. We were told that we could not fuel there, and so we turned and made for the mouth of the river leading up to Palembang.

As we approached the mouth of the river a Dutch patrol launch ran out to meet us and led us over the mine-field to safety. We dropped anchor and had a rest, forgetting everything in the rapture of deep sleep—the first for several days.

The rain stirred us, and dawn was breaking. A Dutch pilot-boat was anchored near by, and the captain spent half an hour ahoying and calling before the official aboard could be roused. At last he came on the tug and we sailed slowly up the river.

It is a long river, with palms and swamps and Malay dwellings fringing its banks. The occupants of small *sampans* waved to us as they passed us on their way to the fishing-grounds. The water was flat and not very clean, carrying with it grass and earth from the swampy land, and refuse from the riverside dwellings.

The siren wailed somewhere ahead and we realized that we were getting near to civilization once more.

Suddenly somebody called out: "They're here, coming straight for us!" We lay in the scuppers and craned our necks to see what was going on.

Three of the biggest aircraft I have ever seen were gliding quietly by the water's edge, at a height of not more than a hundred feet. They had flown from inland and were now going downstream on the east bank. In the distance we could hear the noise of machine-guns, but could see no other aircraft.

When the huge planes had passed us, we looked around and saw a Dutch merchantman bearing down on us from our port quarter. As the ship drew up on our beam an officer hailed us.

"Is there anything wrong there?" he asked, in moderate English.

"No; but there's an air raid on," replied our captain, not realizing how funny it sounded.

"Look out for paratroops; the Japanese Flag is flying on the east bank downstream," the Dutch officer warned us.

We all laughed at the skipper's "Thank you very much," in spite of the bad news.

We had not gone much farther when one of the men drew attention to an R.A.F. plane which had fallen into the swamp on the west bank. Suddenly we saw something move in a tree. It was the pilot, waving to us for help.

The boat was put out, and the pilot came aboard. He was a Scot, about twenty-two years of age. There had been a big scrap over the aerodrome, he said, and he had had to make a forced landing owing to lack of fuel. Another fighter had crashed not far away, and had landed upside down. He hadn't been to see what had happened to the pilot, he remarked, with a bluntness which disguised his feelings; he was sure he was dead.

Soon we reached Palembang and tied up at the wharf on the west side. Some of the party hurried off to see the authorities, and returned to tell us that we could only obtain coal at the east side of the river, so we crossed to the other wharf. When we went ashore we were told the story of the Japanese Paratroops.

The enemy had landed parachutists on the oil refinery, and Japanese planes had succeeded in landing on the aerodrome. Dutch and British forces were trying to round them up, but in the meantime the position was grave. The police urged us to take the train to Oosthaven that evening, and let the tug go, for we could not hope to get out of the river again.

It was agreed that the Naval officers and ratings should remain behind to take the tug out should the Japanese be cleaned up. The rest would go by train as suggested.

We took our baggage to the station and were met by a twenty-two-year-old police officer, who gave us tickets and put us in a carriage.

The station was crowded with Dutch women and children who were being sent away to safety, and with Javanese and Eurasian families. A number of Dutch and Javanese Volunteers—in their green uniforms and German-style helmets—were saying good-bye to wives and kiddies, and tears and embraces made the scene a trial.

The train started at 7.15, and we relaxed. We were filthy, unwashed, unshaven, reeking of salt and soot and perspiration; our clothes, which we had not changed since we left Singapore, were black from the stokehold and I wondered if we should ever get them clean again.

A number of young Dutch women shared the coach with us, and though they could speak little English and we no Dutch, somehow the conversation was developed gradually, and within an hour we were receiving chocolates and cigarettes, and telling them of our experiences, cracking jokes and feeling very much at home. The police officer bought a number of packets of Dutch cigarettes when we stopped at a station, and some sweets, which we devoured thankfully.

There was not much room to spare and I was dog-tired, so I stretched out on the floor between the two lines of seats and fell asleep. When I awoke it was dawn and we were still miles away from Oosthaven. The train had been stopped at many places to pick up troops and R.A.F. personnel. I was very sorry indeed for a squadron which had been sent

from the Western Desert, and had disembarked at Oosthaven a few hours previously. They were heading for Palembang Aerodrome, but when it fell to the Japanese they had been told to go back.

The train drew into Oosthaven at ten o'clock on Sunday, after a trip of fifteen hours. A large Dutch liner was in dock, and I was amazed to see that it had contained troops who were off-loading their Bren-gun carriers and trucks, anti-aircraft guns, and equipment. Surely they were too late and would only lose their equipment!

Dutch police officers met us at the quay, and the young man in charge of us was told that he could not go back as Palembang had been taken by the Japanese, and the previous night's train was the last to leave. He had only the clothes he was wearing, very little money, but he decided to accompany us to Batavia.

The liner sailed at 5 p.m. and the passengers were the strangest possible assortment. Rich Americans from the oil companies, Dutch of all stations, ragged, dirty Englishmen, clean Europeans for odd contrast, poor Javanese families huddled on the deck around the galley, wounded men lying on their stretchers, soldiers, evacuees, escapees, and even one or two deserters filled the cabins and the decks. We were put on the deck near to the Javanese, and had to queue up at the galley for food.

It was atrocious food. Dirty, nondescript curry and rice, with spices that burnt your throat and made you feel sick, strong tea in filthy cups, or reheated coffee with condensed milk, were supplied for us. At one time I saw some of the Javanese crew filling the ice-box with meat and vegetables and I resolved to eat no more. The meat was black and covered with dust. A cigarette-end was flattened against one side of beef, and I drew attention to it, but the Asiatics ignored me. Cabbages and other greens were brown and bad, fish was stinking and rotten, I felt sick, and helped myself to a long drink of cooling water from a communal tap used by passengers and crew alike.

Although the ship tied up at Tanjong Priok, port of Batavia, on the afternoon of the following day, there were so many passengers that the Immigration and Customs officials were overwhelmed, and we did not leave the vessel until ten o'clock at night. Rain was falling heavily, and we were drenched in our thin shirts and shorts.

The Dutch police took us into the station, and we waited patiently for an hour whilst arrangements were being made for our accommodation. Then we drove into Batavia to a large, impressive building, the Nederlandsche Handel-Maatschappij Factory. Upstairs, behind the Java Bank building, we were led into a canteen, and were met by a jovial lady of about sixty and her daughter, a large, jolly girl whose name we discovered was Marie.

They fed us on thick ham sandwiches and coffee, the first bread we had seen since leaving Singapore. We were shown our beds, and given two quinine tablets each before retiring.

The care with which the Dutch tended us and fed and accommodated us was exemplary. On the following morning a bank official came to collect our Malayan currency, and guilders to value were in our hands within an hour. One elderly gentleman had lost his baggage in the transfer from one launch to another, and had little or no money. Shorts

and shirts mysteriously arrived for him, exactly his size. A set of white clothes appeared also, and then, as if they could not do enough, a huge assortment of boots and shoes was sent in for us to take as many as fitted us. A wireless was rigged up in the dormitory, and magazines were provided.

After two days, during which time we had changed and washed the clothes we had worn for six days, removed our week's growth of beard and had clean hair-cuts, we began to feel that we were imposing on the generosity of our Dutch hosts, and suggested that we should find accommodation elsewhere. They seemed hurt and asked if everything had been satisfactory. Of course it had, it was perfection. Then why did we want to go? they asked us. And so we stayed, thankful that they really wanted us to remain there.

Victor Smith and I spent our time walking round the shops buying the few things we dared with our limited funds, and calling frequently at the Consulate for information on sailings. We had one single idea in common: our work in Malaya was finished, we had lost our belongings and money in Singapore, and we wanted to get back home, where at least we had family and friends and a little money in the bank.

The atmosphere in Batavia was one of growing unrest, with British and Dutch troops filling the streets with their trucks and cars, the flow of evacuees, and the occasional alerts indicating to those who had seen the same thing happen before that this was the prelude to the fight. Buildings were painted a drab grey-green, and shops were boarded up to replace the glass.

Meanwhile the Consul had arranged passages for our party, and I was given a ticket for the steamship *Marella*, from which we deduced that we were bound for Australia.

On Saturday the 21st February we went aboard the *Marella*, and I was glad to see that my friends the R.N.Z.A.F. Constructors Unit were accompanying us. They had, after salvaging their plant all the way through Malaya, been successful in loading every piece on to a steamer in Singapore, when the last piece of bad luck overtook them. The docks were raided and their ship was sunk before she had sailed.

There was a scene on the wharf before we sailed which reflected the attitude of the Asiatic crew in a disturbing way. A number of Chinese and Javanese refused to work and walked off the gangway holding out their wrists demanding arrest. A small detachment of Javanese soldiers drew their ancient swords, but were unable to use them, and resorted to persuasive methods. These failed, and the R.N.Z.A.F. boys took the matter into their own hands, and their medium of persuasion, though a trifle rough and physical, was none the less effective.

The *Marella* left Tanjong Priok in the early afternoon and we sailed into the Sunda Strait. In this narrow and dangerous neck of water a convoy was mustered by the cruiser *Exeter*, and the strange assortment of ships sailed away in the evening, doing nine knots.

Our ship, formerly a German luxury steamer, was crowded to capacity with the R.N.Z.A.F. personnel, Malaysians, and the wives and children of British and Dutch Colonials. Few had adequate clothes, and money was short. The reaction of the Chinese boys and the Javanese crew to

this situation was reflected in their complete indifference, their anti-European attitude, and their obvious refusal to do more than the very minimum of work.

Three men shared our cabin: Victor Smith, a mechanical engineer from the P.W.D. named Watson, and myself. We were closeted in a small place aft, over the propeller shaft, on the lower deck. There was no fan, no blowers, and no ventilator. The port had to be closed by night for black-out, and we stifled rather than slept. Consequently our nights gave us no rest whilst we were in the tropics, and I began to wonder what it was like to sleep on a soft bed with air and quiet and nothing to disturb.

The experiences on the tug were bound to have their effect, and one man who had knocked his leg whilst aboard was unable to clear the blood of the poison owing to the bad water and food which had impoverished his system. I was confined to bed, shortly after leaving Batavia, with a mild form of dysentery which I was unable to shake off for four days. When I was up and about again the weather had cooled off a little, and a pleasant breeze was blowing to tone the blood and renew vigour.

We had left the convoy behind after a few hours' sailing, as the *Exeter* and an accompanying destroyer had left us, and there was no point in staying with the convoy unprotected, sailing at nine knots when our ship could run at twelve.

The atmosphere on board ship was vastly different from that on board the *Narkunda* when she brought me to Malaya in 1940. The hardships which most people had suffered broke down the artificial reserve which characterized my former trip. We were all broke, and knew it. All, that is, except a small group of Americans who had left Java with all their baggage intact. The service which these affluent men commanded attracted considerable attention, and not a few hard comments were passed on their behaviour. I could not help feeling that jealousy was the principal reason for the censure, but at the same time the Americans showed a distressing lack of tact, holding cocktail parties in their cabins, and carousing in the smoke-room whilst ill-clad and penniless fellow-passengers looked on.

Something happened amongst the women on board the *Marella*. It may be that they were suffering from nervous reaction, or that they had abandoned themselves to the future. Whatever it was, the exhibition was amazing. Some of the younger girls set about in earnest, mixing with the men, littering the blacked-out decks by night, offering themselves to any man who cared to bother. Many married women joined in the chase, and a walk on deck at night became a hazardous adventure. The ship never seemed to go to sleep. Rowdy parties broke up in the early hours of the morning, and some cabins became so crossed and intermixed that we were never sure who to expect coming out or going in. The situation became so serious that the ship's master made his disapproval public, and from that day became a most unpopular man. The women, generally speaking, had more money than the men, most of whom, like myself, had escaped with just the clothes they wore and the cash in their pockets. As a result of this, the men were treated by the women, and

treated too well. One woman made a hobby of collecting males. They flocked around her, and the more there were the more she liked it.

She will live long in my memory as the only woman who ever made me a proposition. I was too disgusted to speak, and wondered what it was in a woman that could so degrade her before a man.

No attempt was made by the ship's company to keep the passengers entertained. The only deck game was quoits, and two pitches had to serve for all the passengers. Bridge became the chief source of relaxation, and I have never played so much in my life as I did on the *Marella*. When the weather was bad we started playing at ten o'clock in the morning and continued until eleven at night, with breaks only for meals. We proved that the game can be played with interest and skill without stakes, for we had no money to spare on cards.

A few bold pianists and soloists entertained us one evening, and provided a most acceptable break in the tedium. And tedium it was—a deep, heavy, and oppressive boredom that grew and flourished in our anxious, worried thoughts. I started a letter home, ready for posting at our first port of call, but found that my mind was a blank, and my pen could not flow over the paper. We were the flotsam of war, the drifting stragglers, washing about the sea, not knowing, or caring very much, which would be the next port of call. We were escapees, the tramps of the campaign.

It was with deep relief that we saw at last the coast of Western Australia, where at least we knew we should be safe for a little while and could return to the normal routine of decent living.

The *Marella* tied up at Fremantle on a Friday, but it was not until Saturday morning that we were able to go ashore. Our first requirements were clothes for a temperate climate, and Victor Smith and I changed the small balance of our Dutch currency for Australian coin.

The sight and feel of British money, after using Malayan dollars and Dutch guilders, gave me an unaccountable pleasure. The Australian Treasury notes, florins, and small coin, though slightly different from the English values, were sufficiently similar to make me realize that I was once more in the country of the white man. There are no half-crowns in Australian currency, however, and the tiny threepenny bit is still in use, the modern and infinitely ugly English type not having been perpetrated in the Commonwealth.

When I counted my cash after changing all the guilders I had my total funds were ninety shillings. If only I had been able to get some of the money out of my bank in Singapore! The clothes rescued in my escape were shirts and shorts and very little underwear, suitable for the tropics only, and we had to buy coat and trousers and shirt and socks to protect us from the coming Australian winter.

To us the prices of clothes seemed appalling, even taking into account the rate of exchange, which is twenty-five shillings to the English pound. We had to be very careful if we were to buy enough. We sent cables home first, so that we could spend the whole of the balance on the articles required. The clothes we bought eventually were cheap and thin, but adequate provided the weather kept warm until we received our salaries.

In the afternoon Smith and I received an invitation to an evening

in Perth from a fellow-passenger. We put on our new clothes and took the bus to town. There was one awkward moment when I discovered a gaudy price ticket inside the jacket lapel, but I was successful in removing the tell-tale unobserved, and searched furtively for any others I may have missed.

Two somewhat inebriated soldiers entered the bus, each of them carrying six or seven pint bottles of beer, which, they insisted on telling us, were only a start. After much fumbling and falling, to an accompaniment of oaths and incoherent exclamations, they succeeded in joining some friends at the back. A little farther on two more soldiers, with a couple of gaudy females on their arms, clambered in and scrambled their way through passengers and beer bottles and legs to the back seats. So this is Saturday night for the boys in Perth, I thought.

I was surprised to see a young army officer enter the bus, greet the soldiers, and fight his way through the by now solid mass of khaki and silk stocking to the rear. Once there, he started to organize a concert, and the bus resounded to somewhat discordant and certainly uncontrolled community singing.

The entertainment thus provided put us in the mood for our night out, and our spirits were not in the least dampened when, after a long trek round in the wet streets, it was discovered that every picture house was full. One of the party suggested that we go dancing, and I looked dubiously at my cheap Bata shoes. But there was nowhere else to go, and we caught another bus to the dance hall.

Our hostesses knew that we were penniless, and paid for admission without creating embarrassment. Inside we were introduced to a party of young men.

Perhaps it was because I had not danced since the previous December, or perhaps because the war seemed very far away, but I let myself go that night without reserve. The dances were fast and furious, there were scores of lovely girls who could dance perfectly, the air was warm and abandoned, and for a few wonderful hours life had no worries for me.

The dance was not over until well after the last bus to the docks, and we stayed the night with three of the boys of our party who had a flat near the Ocean Beach Hotel.

We awoke at 9.30 on the following morning and dressed quickly, remembering that we were to be guests at a bathing party at noon. After returning to the ship for a change and shave, we went back to the flat for a delicious, though unorthodox, meal of hot dogs; then changed for a swim.

The flat was very conveniently situated for the beach. One could change inside and walk across the road straight on to the firm, warm, silver sand. So convenient was the hosts' home that it had become a regular habit for friends to call in at random and use it as a dressing-room. The shower cubicle was littered with trunks and towels left by casual callers.

Victor Smith and I had often heard of Australia's famous surf-bathing, and had seen films of Surf Carnivals at Sydney's Bondi Beach. Now we were to experience the sport.

The breakers rolled in with a musical roar, carrying with them

hundreds of brown bodies as the bathers threw themselves forward in front of the waves and floated to dry land. We stood admiring the technique of the swimmers and the experts with surf boards until we had seen the way it should be done. Then we went in.

When I tied the first turn I was turned over and my head struck the sand, and I emerged rather breathless and very surprised. The second attempt was more successful, however, and soon I was shooting down the waves to land smoothly on the moist sand. I tried another trick, standing to face the surf as it rolled towards me, and diving on to the top of each wave when it was almost breaking. I had only just recovered from one jump when the next roll was upon me, and at last I retired for a rest.

An hour later, salt-soaked, with sand in our hair and the effects of the sun producing a pleasant tingle over our backs, we made our way back to the flat for a shower and change.

We said good-bye to the friends we had made that week-end and returned to the ship. This, our first introduction to the hospitality of Australia, had been a huge success, and simple though it was, will live long in our memory.

Although it had been intended to sail on Monday, the *Marella* did not cast off until Tuesday morning. We had been given another cabin, a few passengers having left the ship, and this time we were more comfortable.

The next stage of the trip was uneventful, although the weather was rough across the Australian Bight, great waves breaking over the bows and flooding the crew's quarters, and a heavy swell rolling the ship from side to side, throwing chairs and carpets across the saloon to smash against the bulkheads. We steamed into Melbourne on 10th March to unload the frozen meat and tins of milk which had been loaded at the same port in November 1941, intended for Singapore, but which had never reached their destination.

Victor and I reported at once to the Malayan agent in Melbourne, who had been posted there to give assistance to escapees. He was a Malayan Civil Servant who had been on leave when the war started, and he listened with sympathy to our story. After establishing our identity, we were given five pounds each, and went into town to spend the money as carefully as possible.

Melbourne is a beautiful city, with wide, smooth-surfaced roads, the best shops I had seen since leaving England, and a comprehensive plan of lay-out. We walked for whole days admiring the shops, though buying very little, and sitting in the parks beneath English elms and willows, tropical palms and ferns, and Australian trees whose names I never knew, which seem to grow only in the Commonwealth.

The American Forces had just arrived. Shops were sporting window displays with Stars and Stripes mixed with Australia's flag, and cards inviting the Doughboys to come in and buy. "Welcome to Uncle Sam's Boys" shouted out from dozens of windows. Schedules showing the exchange value of American money and Australian currency were in all the larger stores, with the words "American money accepted"—a privilege granted to no other nationality, and to our minds not very

necessary, as there were plenty of banks where a man could change his money in five minutes without risk of being swindled.

We saw the American soldiers. They walked in twos and threes, smartly and quietly, dressed in a pale khaki uniform consisting of simply trousers and shirt of some silky material, perfectly tailored for ease and appearance. Their khaki or black ties—depending on whether they were Army or Air Corps—were tucked neatly into their shirts. Forage caps were piped along the edge with piping of varying patterns. There were no flashy buttons, badges, decorations; officers wore straightforward metal strips about an inch long by a quarter-inch wide, in brass or silver, to denote rank. The men were sober, and an example of discipline and deportment. We were impressed at the sight of our new Allies.

As our ship was going to be some time in dock, we had to fill in the days as best we could with little money. We went to News theatres occasionally, to pass an hour in the afternoon, but soon tired of them when we realized that the same films were repeated at every place day after day. The films were far from topical, the only up-to-date one being Gordon Bennett's arrival in Australia from Singapore.

Reading the papers, we became uncomfortably aware of the growing anti-British attitude, suggested rather than directly stated, following the loss of Malaya. The public, who were uninformed except by the Press, assumed that the A.I.F. had borne the brunt of the battles in the East and had been let down badly. Once we were glad to observe that Winston Churchill had made a statement on the matter, and we felt that the Home Government knew the reason for Singapore's surrender. There was no shortage of food or water or supplies in Malaya; nor had the Australians gone into action until the Japanese were some fifty or sixty miles north of the Causeway. The injustice of the situation bore on us very heavily, but we knew that it was useless to argue, and certainly not the time to stop and blame anyone. The thing that mattered most was to pull together, forgetting the past and making full use of the knowledge gained by our mistakes. Instead, the public of Australia appeared to have turned away from England and looked towards America, not, we felt, because they were so pro-Roosevelt as, anti-Churchill.

They seemed to be ignorant of the fact that Britain had had her back to the wall, fighting for her very life, and that if the Germans could have taken the opportunity and struck first, the country might easily have been in German hands to-day. Nor did they realize that their own whining and cries for help emphasized that, if Britain had fallen, Australia could not have stood alone.

We went to Sandringham one day, and were taken by a girl from the ship to meet an Australian family. The mother was immensely proud of her sons, who were serving in the R.A.N., and of her two attractive daughters. Her song of praise for her boys was understandable, but we could detect the antagonism towards us in her every word. Her sons, and the sons of other Australian mothers, were the only hope left for the Empire. She amazed us by disclosing her dread of the Japanese; her fear of the possibilities of an invasion; and I cast my mind back to the days of 1940 when the British Public faced a similar threat with

calmness and determination, inspired by the hard, straight words of the Premier. This distracted woman's one plan in the event of the arrival of the Japanese was to buy a revolver and shoot her two daughters rather than risk them with the invaders.

At the docks the *Marella* was still being unloaded. There was very little cargo, as the ship is a passenger carrier, and had been drawing on her cargo for three months whilst at sea. Two hundred tons of frozen meat and about the same amount of condensed milk and flour filled the holds. It took nine days to unload. Every few minutes it seemed that there was a break for tea or a smoke or just a rest. The British working man has long been a standing joke as a study of still life, but the Melbourne docker should be given pride of place in all fairness to his craft.

The general atmosphere in Melbourne was restless. The news was inclined to be sensational; the advent of the Americans had stirred the public; shops were being boarded up, everywhere were troops, R.A.A.F. and Navy; the enemy had bombed Darwin; and posters showed a Japanese soldier clambering over the Globe from the Equator, one huge hand outstretched towards Australia, and with the caption "He's coming South" shouting out its panic-stricken warning. The advertising posters for a paper contained two words only—"Coming Nearer". The first rumours of rationing were abroad. War had never been so near to Australia.

We were glad to leave the port on 18th March, and hoped for better things when we passed under the Sydney Harbour Bridge and tied up on the 20th.

Rain was falling heavily, and this was the subject on most lips, the war apparently forgotten for a time. This was the first real shower for seven years. The drought in Sydney had become a serious thing, water was very scarce, and hot baths were forbidden.

We reported to the Malayan Agency, but it was Saturday, and almost noon, so we were told to find accommodation for the week-end and report again on Monday.

I had thirty shillings, Victor about three. We were told to go to the Metropole, which would be cheap and convenient. The room we were given was fitted with two beds, cost fifteen shillings a night, food extra. That left us three shillings for food for two days.

There is a certain independence about being penniless that cannot be felt in any other circumstances. We decided that we couldn't hope to pay our way until we received money on Monday, so with the little we had we went to the pictures at night, ate well and stocked ourselves with cigarettes.

Sunday was a problem. Fortunately the rain had stopped, and we walked in Hyde Park, sat on a seat reading a paper until we knew its contents off by heart, and walked round again. The sculptures in the Park are appalling and crude, nudity being the first essential, grace, pose and beauty the last. The statue of Captain Cook has two outstanding points. One is the huge hook nose which stands out in silhouette, and the other is the unfortunate way the figure is standing, with telescope in what I am sure is a most un-nautical position.

Sydney sleeps on Sunday. Apart from the couples sitting or lying on the grass, the very occasional tram-car that clanged and careered along the street, and the singing of the birds, the city was dead.

Monday meant reports and changing to more comfortable diggings, trams and long walks and parcels. We were footsore and very tired when at last the long day closed.

Our new home was in Macleay Street, at Potts Point, near to Elizabeth Bay and a wonderful view of the harbour. Once settled there, we took stock of our position regarding clothes and salary and our next move.

The prospect was not too bright. We had been warned that we might be given notice by the Home Government, but in the meantime could not take up any employment unless in a voluntary capacity. We resigned ourselves to the circumstances, bearing in mind our single aim—to get Home.

We were shopping when the rain started.

For four days it poured, sheeting down as heavily as in the tropics, and daily bulletins announced that the watersheds were flooding, that the Paramatta river had at last begun to flow. Victor and I, who were sharing a room, were drenched several times, and had to dry our clothes before we could venture out again. Gradually we built up our wardrobes, each purchase bringing back with a sharp pang the memory of the large stock of clothes we had left in Singapore, enough to last the whole tour of three or four years. The unaccustomed walking on hard pavements, and the cheap shoes we wore, rubbed the skin from our toes and heels, but after a week we were back to normal again.

Sydney has a city atmosphere of bustle and crowds and shops and cinemas more pronounced than Melbourne. The streets are far too narrow for the heavy traffic of trams, drays, lorries, buses, cars and bicycles. In peace time I imagine that life in Sydney could be pleasant, with plenty of everything to amuse and entertain, good services from the city to the suburbs, beaches at a convenient distance, a mild climate and beautiful views.

But in war time the trams are always full to overflowing; the shops close at six o'clock. Martin Place is disfigured by a hut and platform for recruiting and War Loan campaigns; the Post Office is hidden behind a wall of wood and sand and steel, reducing the already narrow pavement of Pitt Street to nil, windows are barricaded. Noisy soldiers jump the tram just in front of the next person, be it man, woman or child, rush here, rush there, don't stop to think. At the end of a fortnight we hated the prospect of going into the shopping centre, and spent most of our time surfing at Bondi Beach, or walking in the parks, or working in the privacy of our rooms.

Almost three weeks had passed and we had bought all the clothes we needed urgently. Time lay heavy on our hands and we felt to be needlessly wasting time. We decided to try to find a job of work.

I tried the Australian equivalent to my own Engineering Institution, and found I was not wanted. Victor fared better at the Architects' Institution, and returned to tell me that he was going to see a man at the Department of the Interior. Perhaps I should have better luck there, I thought, and agreed to accompany him.

Our interviews were not very satisfactory. It might have been that two young men trying to obtain employment without pay appeared suspicious. We were told to submit a letter pointing out our qualifications, covered by permission from the Malayan agent. Had we not been determined to do something to keep us in touch with our profession the humbug would have made us disgusted and we should have let the matter drop.

Several days later we reported to the Department. Victor was to work on camouflage; I was in the Civil Engineering Section. We spent the first day looking at files and plans, bored to tears but resigned to the ordeal of the preliminaries.

Victor was taken round the outskirts of Sydney to inspect certain sites that were being camouflaged. The man who was in charge of the party was not a professional man, but a man who had found his way into the temporary war job and who, being now a Government official and proud of it, was making the most of his position. On arrival at each site he did not deign to introduce his followers properly, merely pointing to them and saying to the supervisor on the job, "This is a Cook's Tour."

On the same day I accompanied an engineer, a surveyor and a camouflage architect to a large aerodrome several miles out of Sydney, where we met the Resident Engineer and camoufleur. The engineer had worked in Malaya for some time, and we became friendly at once.

The day was spent in looking at sites for other works, each of the men having an interest in different aspects, and I absorbing as much information as possible. It soon became clear that the actual work was not being run by the officials, but by a tradesman who had worked his way up to the position of foreman. In fact, a large number of valuable men had wasted a full day and several gallons of petrol without result. I was told that I was to take over from the Resident Engineer in a few days, and the prospect was not by any means pleasing.

When I arrived home at nine o'clock that night Victor told me of his day and expressed his disgust. We both thought of walking out and leaving the Department, but decided that that would be rather childish after the first set-back.

We went to the office on the next day to try again, and fared a little better. Victor requested to be given a worth-while job of work free from interference, so that he could settle down and be responsible only to the Head of his Section. The architect in charge, a very reasonable man who saw my friend's argument and recognized his ability, stationed him at a distant aerodrome. I appealed to my Head in similar terms, and was told that I should be stationed at a nearby site in charge of Aerodrome Construction.

The engineer who was controlling the work at that time, together with a large number of similar jobs at widely scattered points, was a 'Pomie', as Englishmen are called in Australia. He was a native of Salford, and seventeen years' absence had not erased his Lancashire accent.

We went to the work site, and I saw that a new hut had been erected on the job for my use. I was to be Resident Engineer

Two men were in charge of the work as supervisors, and we were to work together. They were introduced to me as Olly, the Maintenance Officer, and John Dooley, known amongst his friends as Honest John. I had at last started to build instead of destroy.

CHAPTER XII

JOHN B. DOOLEY was born in New South Wales and was of Irish extraction. His had been a hard life, a fight, and he had turned his hand to many things in his time. He was a thoughtful man, soft-spoken, fundamentally honest, blessed with a great sense of humour and a large open face. In the early 1930's he had entered the Senate as a Labour Member, but his ideals and his aims were unpopular, and he left after six years.

To a newcomer and an interested outsider, John Dooley was a fund of knowledge and a frank and honest exponent on the country and people of Australia. We were ideally suited for working together, for he needed my technical knowledge and I his experience.

Olly was originally a Jack-of-all trades, principally a joiner, I think, who had, by sheer efficiency and a way with men, established himself as a reliable and invaluable foreman. The incongruous thing about him was that he didn't look a bit reliable. He was slim, red-faced, with wispy fair hair that just wouldn't stay put, and twinkling eyes that told of years of wild oats. He was middle-aged, but his young mouth had a permanent twitch that suggested he would laugh his way through and then just fade away without ever growing old.

The American Army Air Corps had taken over the aerodrome, and the Department was anxious to finish the job at once. When completed, the runways were to be just twice their original size, and the whole area was to be sealed with bitumen and chippings. Drainage was a ticklish problem, and land had to be graded and two swamps reclaimed. There was only one plan showing the parts to be extended, and all design had to be done on the site as work proceeded. Three contractors who were completing an old contract were to be retained for the new work, which would cost £70,000.

At first the engineer who had handed over the work was inclined to be anxious, and called frequently. After a week or two, however, the job was left for John Dooley and myself to work out alone, and we were soon making good headway. The contractors were fair-minded men, and I was able to agree on points of policy with them without much trouble.

The chief difficulty was that the flying field was in constant use, and I had many narrow escapes from aircraft landing very near to me as I was standing by an instrument. Lorries had to be diverted so as to run down strips that were not in use, and as the wind changed daily this was a constant problem.

The Americans were very appreciative of our efforts to speed up the job, and accommodated us in every way. We became friendly with many of the officers, and the sentries knew us well.

I was very happy at the prospect of doing a useful job of work before I left Australia, and came home every evening so tired that I forgot my private worries and slept soundly.

One Saturday morning, as I was passing along Pitt Street in a tram, I was surprised to see that the streets were already crowded with people awaiting the opening of the shops. I thought no more of it until I came back into the centre in the early afternoon.

The tram stopped every few yards while shoppers swarmed in front of it. At King Street, where I had to alight to catch a connecting tram, the mob was pressing solid from wall to wall. Trams were packed through, and I had to wait half an hour before I could get a foothold on the platform of one.

When I returned home I heard what it was all about. The Government had announced that Clothes Rationing was to come into force on a certain date, and the shops had been rushed the next morning. Women drew money from their banks and fought into the shops, snatching madly at socks, shoes, shirts, underwear, wool, coats, suits, hats and ties, without thought for the number or the size or the price. Some stores were emptied in two hours, others had to close in self-defence. One woman bought thirty-seven pairs of shoes of different sizes, a man bought twelve hats, crowds were fighting, pushing, shouting, panicking.

A quiet-voiced lady wanted two pairs of silk stockings. There were only two kinds in stock at the shop she entered, one was very expensive, the other not quite so highly priced, and only a few pairs remained. She decided on the cheaper stockings, and as she was buying her two pairs, an aggressive, loud-mouthed woman pushed her way in front of her, bought every pair of expensive stockings in the shop and, turning to the lady said, "To-day youse us and us is youse."

Victor and I, who had to buy a little each month-end when our salaries were paid, were dismayed to think that our chance had gone to buy any more. Working a long way out of Sydney, we left before the shops opened and came home after six o'clock. In any case, the shops were closed now by noon, as they worked on the principle of selling only a certain quota per day. One store sold out one month's quota in the first two hours of the panic. Another closed its coat department for three weeks, which meant that in one morning alone twenty-one times the usual quantity had been sold.

The Government, realizing the blunder it had made in announcing the date of rationing, made a film of the first day's rush. The crowds were likened to sheep; a woman tore at another woman as she was holding a garment, and received a mouthful of invective in return, the scene being followed by a remarkably similar picture of two goats bleating in each other's faces. A woman was shown being decorated by Hitler for her help in the war effort; another female was shown surrounded by stacks of shoes which didn't fit her, a man looking foolish with twelve hats on his head. The film ended with a shot of the new rationing cards, on which were printed the words: "Issued for your protection."

Perhaps the instinct to rush and panic has been developed from the days of the Gold Rush; perhaps it is because the early pioneers had to get in first in order to survive. But without a doubt the instinct is there, a dangerous thing, uncontrollable and disastrous, especially in war time, when the first essential is calm and clear thinking.

I wondered what would happen in Sydney when the first air raid came.

On the Monday following the first panic I went to a place on the edge of the Blue Mountains. I had spent the week-end setting out the work for the week whilst I was away, and everything was going well on my job.

The work was surveying in country in which only gum trees and scrub could grow. I had to live in a cottage as the guest of two old maids, and was picked up by a lorry at seven-thirty each morning, returning at five.

When I arrived at the site on the first day I was asked to choose the men whom I would like to carry my staff and tape, and drive pegs at the points required. I looked round the motley crowd of casual labourers, knowing none of them. My choice, for no apparent reason, was for a young blond lad with keen eyes and hard, clean face, and an older man with greying hair and a pale skin.

The young man was Garney Shepperd, who owned a few acres of land near by, and the other was Paddy, an Irishman with a quiet voice and, I found not much later, a keen sense of humour.

The working spot was too far from my diggings, and I took sandwiches and tea for the midday snack. When ten o'clock drew near Garney collected a few dry twigs and lit a fire. Two forked stakes with a piece of wood across the top formed the frame from which billy tins were hung to boil the water.

There is a quiet restfulness about sitting on the ground round a small fire sipping hot fresh tea, with the warm sun on one's back and the smell of wood-smoke as the thin blue coils rise from the glowing spills or bits of iron bark. I had run out of cigarettes, for they were difficult to get in Sydney, and Paddy gave me paper and fine cut tobacco for me to roll one myself. I enjoy a rolled cigarette more than a ready-made, for I should not trouble to make one if I did not really want it.

The break at noon was the most enjoyable, for we had half an hour in which we could lie in the sun, chatting about this and that. Garney could not utter many words without inserting an epithet, but the words were so meaningless that somehow they did not create offence. Paddy spoke little, but when he did say something it was pithy and humorous, so that we never tired of conversation, because of the occasional laugh.

The vocabulary of Australian words and expressions which I had acquired in the previous weeks proved invaluable, for Garney and Paddy used every known Australianism in their conversation. There is something rugged and friendly about many of the terms, speaking of open country and timber and earth.

The best-known word is 'Digger', meaning the Australian generally, its origin reminiscent of the early pioneers. 'Cobber'—friend, comrade—has not so obvious a connection with anything, but strikes a warm

note exactly in keeping with the context when introduced by the Australian. When a thing is of excellent quality it is 'bonzer'; when it is genuine it is 'dinky-die'. A thing that is just right, or a statement that is true, is 'dinkum' or 'fair dinkum'.

The Englishman may be called a 'kipper', the Australians having assumed, I heard it explained, that the breakfast delicacy of that name was the staple diet in 'the Old Country'. Or he may be called a 'Pommie', which term is an abbreviation of pomegranate. The Englishman who came from home to try to make his livelihood in Australia during the emigration campaign was poor, and his thrift and abstinence contrasted so much with the gambling instincts and open-handedness of the pioneer settlers that he was likened to the fruit, which is dry, all seeds, without flesh or blood. The term has lost its original significance, and is used freely by the English themselves.

The Australian's indication of delight or assent always amused me, and I found myself saying "good-o" and "whacko" to Paddy and Garney, quite naturally and unconsciously.

I learned of the work the men did, just a few cattle and fowl on a small piece of land. They were contented with life.

The thing that struck me most after my illuminating experiences in the cities was that I had been accepted at once as one of them, for they had no prejudices, their opinions were their own, not based on any newspaper propaganda. They preferred to take every man on his merits, to judge for themselves.

We were together for a week, and at the end of this time we had split off from the main gang of forest clearers to go to another site. We went in Garney's station flivver, a converted car with a good engine but nothing else to commend it. Before long I was privileged to drive the vehicle from one point to another over the fields where we were working, whilst the two men were driving pegs.

In Sydney I had been disgusted at the mercenary attitude of the working man, watching the clock so as to be off the job on the stroke of the hour. One man outlined his daily programme to me, explaining that he had to finish work at ten minutes to five so that he could be waiting at the gate for the hour to strike. "Or else I might be giving the Government a few minutes I'm not paid for," he explained.

Garney and Paddy had different views. Within a few days they were taking a keen interest in the work, and on the last day, when it seemed as if we might not finish in time, they hurried with the setting-out, and worked to the last minute to complete the job. It was dusk when we left the site, and I took them into a hotel for a drink.

They dropped me at my lodgings, and I said good-bye. As the ancient car rolled away I thought that this was the Australian as I should like to remember him, broad-minded and big-hearted, honest and clean. Not the man I found in the towns, narrow and bigoted, avaricious and ill-mannered.

This, too, was Australia as I had imagined it, the country which would live in my memory. Rolling hills and wide country roads, huge open fields with cattle grazing, stray foals on the highways, the horse and sulky or the man going to do his shopping on horseback; the raucous

cry of the kookaburra drowning the song birds; the wide, slow-running river with its peaceful riverside gardens and the fields of maize; the dusty tracts of dead gum trees, the distant mountains standing tree-clad and magnificent, paling to a misty blue on the farther peaks, with the new road winding up the side in a graceful brown spiral of freshly-cut earth. Not the smell and the thin mud of the street, the noisy trams and vulgar trumpeting horns of big cars, the panicking mob, the cut-price stores, the prostitutes of King's Cross, the thugs of Woolloomoolloo.

I spent the evening working out my readings, and on the next day I packed up my bag ready for departure. The two old maids charged me an absurdly small sum for the week and gave me a bunch of freshly picked roses from their garden. I walked along the dusty road to the small station and a little later caught the train for Sydney.

A letter was waiting for me on my return. The High Commissioner for the United Kingdom informed me that my services were to be terminated in accordance with the terms of my agreement. I was entitled to a passage to England, and must get in touch with the Agent in Sydney for details.

Victor had received a similar letter, and we went to see the Malayan Agent on the next day. Our salary was calculated up to the end of our notice, and we were given permission to arrange our own passages.

The loss of employment was a blow, but there was compensation in the thought that we could at last go home. Just three months had elapsed since we left Singapore, and we were weary of the uncertainty and suspense. Now, at last, we were free to go as we pleased. Once home we could join one of the Services or take on a technical job.

I thought of my original mission—three or four years in Malaya, and home after perhaps four-and-a-half years' absence. Now I should be back in my home town within two years. My mind pictured the house on the edge of the country, with the natural park on the north, and Pendle Hill, one of the Pennine Chain, standing proud and bold to the north-west, the old farms and occupation roads round by Red Lane, the large natural reservoirs lying in the bottom so cool and still, the winding canal like a silver ribbon laid along the valleys. Imagination took me back to the moors of Boulsworth and Pinnah, purple with heather, and sheep grazing quietly on the gentle slopes, to Noyna Rocks and their views of the distant hills, to the commons and Tum Hill over the south side of the town, where it is said that the Romans built their early camps.

For the first time since I left home I was homesick.

The next few days were spent in rushing around to the shipping agents, to the bank, the Malayan Agency, the Customs Office and all the many offices which want to know, a hundred times over, name and address—in block letters—age in years and months, date of birth, sex and state, married, single or bereaved. We were signing along the dotted line on dozens of different forms for a dozen different reasons, crossing out the words which did not apply, filling in blanks, telling the Commonwealth Government all we knew about ourselves before we left. We enjoyed the fun of it, for it meant so much to us, and the officials were helpful and made it all very easy.

On taking stock of our possessions we realized that we had very little to wear, and not enough suitcases. The panic rush had quietened down in the shops, but buying was still heavier than normal, and the day's quota was sold by ten o'clock. We invaded the centre at nine every morning for a week, and managed to get a pair of socks here, a tie there, handkerchief somewhere else. Buying had taken on a new significance now, for we were to take the things to England.

Two things are outstanding in Australia for quality. One is leather coats, the other woollen socks. I have never seen coats of such fine calfskin, with the backs made all in one piece and the finish so smooth and finely grained. Even after the huge demand of the past week the range and quality of socks was astounding.

John Dooley and Olly had been making excellent progress during the week whilst I was away, and now that I was due to leave we had to get designs and quantities completed so that they could carry on without a hitch. I was late to work on most mornings, owing to my visits to shops and offices, but we worked later in the day with greater intensity. The plans which I had drawn up in my little shack on the job were finished off and filed in a simple system. We completed the pegging-out of the site, and spent the rest of the time supervising construction.

Notice of sailing was short. The first date was rescinded, and we had to stand by from day to day, ready to go at an hour's warning. It was during our wait that Sydney experienced its first taste of the war.

Several large ships, naval and cargo vessels, were in the harbour on the Sunday night when the Japanese submarines penetrated the net and fired their torpedoes. They missed their main objective and struck a ferry boat. Depth charges were dropped, and the explosions shook the building where I was sleeping.

"Jap subs sunk in Sydney Harbour" was shouted out from every newsboy's bill on the following day.

Day after day the papers showed pictures of the two submarines being raised, the principal feature during a comparatively quiet period. The effectiveness of the explosions was apparent from the fact that whole pieces of the hulls had been blown off. Torpedoes were still in position in the tubes, and the raising operation had been a delicate business.

The second attack on Sydney occurred at about eleven o'clock one Sunday night. I had just gone to bed, when I heard what was obviously the sound of gunfire. I dressed and went down to the water's edge to see what was going on. Everything was quiet, and I was turning for home when the street lights went out. A few moments later the alert was sounded.

No aircraft appeared, but the wardens were on the streets, and the alarm was useful as a practice. Victor was in the city at the time, and he said that there was considerable excitement at the sound of the siren; but the few people who were about soon quietened down when they realized that no bombing was going to take place.

On the next day we heard the story. A Japanese submarine had

shelled the coast, and a few houses at Rose Bay had been damaged. The raid had no military significance, and appeared to be a show of bravado.

A newspaper with powerful imagination headed its feature with the dramatic words "Sydney's War Scars."

Before the two attacks had been made the brown-out of Sydney was a careless thing, some people not troubling to do anything whatsoever to dim their lights or screen their windows. From the day of the first submarine visit, however, lights were very much more carefully watched, and the harbour frontage showed the biggest improvement of all. On the day after the second occurrence the streets were full of people carrying paper and gum and string and blinds. They had learnt their lesson.

On Saturday the 6th June I said good-bye to John Dooley and Olly and the engineers at the Department of the Interior.

We were awakened early on Tuesday morning by the telephone. The Agents were on the line, and we were told to catch a train that night for the ship.

Half an hour later the post arrived, and with it a letter from the High Commissioner. It appeared that we had been dismissed in error, and our notice was rescinded. We were to await further instructions regarding transfer to another Colony.

Our passages were booked, insurances taken out, money changed. The train was leaving that night for Brisbane and the ship home. And now we had to stay where we were and wait.

We had ideas about destroying the letters and saying we never received them, about having them sent on to England by a friend as if they had arrived after our departure and been forwarded. Finally we agreed that the only thing to do was to lay everything before the Malayan Agent and appeal to him for our original plan to go through.

An anxious day was spent, in which time we were able to ascertain that the ship was not sailing until week-end, and we could catch a later train. The Agent was sympathetic, and sent a telegram to Canberra saying that he intended to send us home to report there, if the High Commissioner had no objections.

No reply had been received on Thursday, and we were told to go. We ran round to our friends' homes, surprised to realize how many we had made in that short time in Sydney, and a taxi took us to Central Station at eight o'clock.

Rain was falling in Sydney when we left, just as it had been falling on the first day we saw it.

We were fortunate to obtain a sleeper, and we relaxed as the train left Sydney for its long journey north. The windows were blacked out and stuffy, and after reading for a short time we asked the conductor to put up our bunks.

The journey is six hundred and nineteen miles. The train, which was a relief with very few stops according to schedule, took twenty-four hours to cover this distance. We seemed to be stopping everywhere, running only a few miles before jerking to a standstill. Once a child's tricycle was on the line, and twice we stopped at stations for meals.

The idea of pulling up and delaying the train for an hour whilst the passengers scrambled for a meal in the station restaurant was new to us, and we were surprised that there should be no dining-car on a trip of so many hours' duration. A derailment held us up for an hour or more, and other stoppages were for trains which were approaching on the single track, necessitating pulling in at passing loops.

On arrival at South Brisbane Station we took a taxi to the Customs Office and then on to the ship, where we were shown our cabin. The ship was a twin-screw motor-vessel of the Port Line, and she was loading refrigerated stores. There were eight cabins for passengers, beautifully fitted, and we anticipated a comfortable and interesting voyage.

Saturday morning brought Customs examination and other formalities, and then we were free to go into Brisbane.

Although I was in the Queensland city for one day only, I was struck with its cleanness, quietness, the silver trams, and the lack of bustle and rush which one usually associates with a city. By a stroke of good fortune Victor and I met a girl who had been staying at our Sydney diggings for some time, and she showed us the buildings of interest and the best place for lunch.

We had met a number of Queensland people in Sydney and had found them quieter and more tractable, more reasonable than the people of New South Wales. The impression grew when we called in at shops in Brisbane, for we were treated politely, offered alternatives if our requests were out of stock, allowed to buy cigarettes in spite of the shortage and the fact that we were not regular customers.

Victor and I returned to the ship and spent the rest of the day watching the cargo being loaded. The Brisbane stevedores are far superior to those of any other Australian port for speed and efficiency. Although they enjoy occasional smoke-ohs and tea-ohs they return to work without delay and work hard for their pay. We were interested to see hundreds of cases of butter sliding down the chutes from the cold stores, running along roller tracks to the small gangs of men waiting to stack them, eighty at a time, on the slings which carried them up to the main deck and down again into the bowels of the ship.

It had been intended to sail that night, but we did not cast off until early on Sunday morning.

As we steamed slowly down the river to the sea we passed two cruisers tied up to the wharf. The bands of the Marines on both warships were playing 'Rule Britannia' as only a military band can, producing a sensation of pride and thrill which caught my breath and made my skin tingle. Farther downstream two American warships glided stately by, their clean lines and clear decks giving the impression of power and speed and majesty.

I said good-bye to Australia and turned my thoughts to England.

CHAPTER XIII

AS WE LEFT the river and reached the open sea the paravanes were slung out, for in the shallows there is always the risk of mines. The sea freshened, the sky was dull and grey, and a clammy drizzle hung in the air.

I took stock of the other passengers. A young married couple and their two-year-old child were going to England after their evacuation from Java; a mechanical engineer from Sumatra was going home to start again; a Press correspondent from the *Sydney Morning Herald* was taking his first trip to England, a Birmingham man and his wife and son were returning after two years in Sydney; a young and very talkative Australian girl who had been married eight days was going to New Zealand to join her sailor husband; an old Australian, retired, was taking a trip for his health; and a young New Zealand girl was going home to her parents.

The ship was commanded by a Devon man, one of four brothers who had served during the Great War and who were still upholding the family record by taking their ships along the sea lanes to Britain. The atmosphere of quiet efficiency amongst the officers and men inspired a feeling of confidence, and as the days went by I developed a profound respect for the Merchant Navy, the only Service that wears no uniform, that travels in ships with little defence and no armour.

Gunners from the Royal Artillery and Navy manned the anti-aircraft and light naval guns which comprised the total armament of the vessel.

The sea was choppy for the first few days, and the air turned colder as we headed slightly south of east. By day we played deck golf when the decks were dry, and when darkness fell our usual practice was to play a few rubbers of bridge, going on deck before turning into our bunks to see the green foam of the phosphorescence tumbling by the bows and streaming down the side of the ship, occasional patches of strong light glowing from the spangle so that we seemed to be floating through a constellation.

One Friday in June the distant snowy mountains of New Zealand rose above the sea mists, and I was struck by the beauty of the white peaks standing clear and clean on the horizon. The snow line was clearly marked, the white breaking off suddenly to show the dark greens and browns of the lower lands.

We entered Caroline Bay in the South Island and anchored outside Timaru in the late afternoon to await the tide.

The Australian bride was overcome at the sight of her new home. In a voice vibrant with excitement she said, "It's a big island, isn't it?"

The pilot manœuvred the big ship into the small dock with difficulty, and we tied up at 8 o'clock.

Timaru reminded me of a small English country town. From the neat centre of shops and offices we could walk in one direction to the

sea, in another towards the mountains with their majestic peaks standing coldly inland, giving way as the eye fell on the slopes and valleys to the greens and yellows and browns of the grazing lands. On Sunday a small party walked to the outskirts of the town, striking westward, and came upon a natural park planted with pines and ferns, palms and evergreens. A serpentine lake ran through the middle of a turfy hollow, spanned by rustic bridges and edged with rushes and moss. Wild ducks and black swans floated on the quiet water, snapping at morsels thrown by the delighted children who stood on the bank. Two deer roamed in a compound nibbling at the bread and grass in the visitors' hands. It was like a little bit of England.

Our arrival at Timaru was known to everyone in the small town, and we were greeted in a friendly way by shopkeepers and strangers. One man, who was anxious to help us in every way he could, arranged for some of the passengers to spend the evening with his family and friends, and did us a great service by obtaining permission for us to buy warm clothing without coupons.

We sailed on Tuesday morning and reached Port Chalmers on the following day. The wharf is upstream, and the scenery as we steamed slowly towards the port was soft and quiet, the rolling hills tinted with shades of green and cream standing in pale sunlight against a background of winter blue. As we neared the town, small red and green and brown cottages lined the terraced hillside, a grey-spired church stood halfway up the steep slope, and the boat-sheds occupied the small strip of flat land at the water's edge.

A train chuffed along a hidden track halfway up the hill, threading its way between the dark pines, wound round the headland and disappeared again amongst the lofty trees, only the white steam from its engine showing its progress.

The ship tied up at ten o'clock and we went ashore.

Port Chalmers is a tiny place, with few shops and one small cinema, and a near copy of the Whitehall Cenotaph standing proudly in the middle of its one street. Within a few minutes the Rambler can reach the slopes for the beautiful views of hills and sea and river.

We walked one morning over the hill which rises sheer from the dock. The roads and paths were still covered with hoar frost, and the wind had an edge to it which made our faces glow and the blood run quicker in our veins. We plodded up the steep hillside and stopped to examine the stone edifice at the brow. It is a squat round pillar of local stone, with an anchor worked in sandstone on the top. The tablet explains that Captain Scott and his colleagues sailed from Port Chalmers in the *Terra Nova*, never to return from their expedition to the South Pole.

On three occasions we caught the train to Dunedin, arriving there after a run of twenty-five minutes along the winding river banks. Our expeditions were for shopping only, and in this respect the city supplied all our needs.

The ship sailed from Port Chalmers on Monday, having completely filled her holds for England's larder and tuned up her engines for the long trip home. We ran into a mist, and the sea freshened, throwing

spray against the bulkheads and funnel, whilst there was a distinct drop in temperature.

We crossed the International Date Line after thirty-six hours' steaming, and so that week contained two Tuesdays. In the meantime the clock was going on approximately half an hour each night, as the route was only slightly south of east.

The weather turned colder, the sea developed a heavier swell each day, and the sun disappeared from view. Every movable thing was lashed down, and seamen scuttering along the decks with food led a hazardous life, two out of three trips leading to disaster. Huge lashing breakers rose above the main deck and collapsed with a deep roar on the boards, the barometer dropped to 28.5 inches, the temperature was 39°. Hail battered at our faces and icy wind nipped our ears as we tried to walk the decks for a little exercise. One day the sun struggled through, weak and wet, and the hail glistened and shone in the pale light. A rainbow started up from the churning sea, rose high in a beautiful arc to decorate the leaden sky, and fell steeply again to disappear in the grey waters. We were in the middle of the South Pacific in mid-winter.

Monday the 6th of July was the worst day of all. A fifty-foot sea was running, and the ship was rolling heavily under the gigantic swell. At lunch-time half the food was shot from the plates and deposited on the cloths, passengers were alternately pushed against the table and thrown into the back of their seats. At the close of the meal a particularly heavy roll lifted diners out of their chairs on to the ground, a steward was picked up and thrown, complete with crockery, against the port bulkhead, and glasses and water-jugs tipped over on the bolted-down tables.

The waves were crashing over the high boat deck, and a quick-release raft was torn from its sloping cradle and carried into the sea. A ladder from the main deck to the cabins was torn from its fixing. The bow dipped into the troughs and emerged again in a shower of spray, swamping the fore-deck every few seconds. One giant wave entered the bridge and drenched the officers on watch.

After that day the glass rose slightly, and the wind changed its direction daily. We were able to pace the decks in the cold clear air, and on the drier days the deck golf courses were in great demand.

There is something about a long trip at sea which taxes the nerves and shows up the character. The monotony, boredom and lack of exercise, especially in rough weather, fray the temper of the more highly-strung or those who are lacking in a sense of humour. There is no surer way of seeing the weaknesses of a person than by living with him, day after day, in a small orbit of activity with little scope for self-expression. After a time the women began to criticize the other passengers; one man took the line of least resistance and entered on a gloriously oblivious adventure of intoxication, only to finish up in the slough of alcoholic remorse, and two R.A.F. officers who had joined the ship at Port Chalmers opened a campaign of criticism and complaint about their cabins, the food, the service, and everything concerned with the ship.

Victor and I were fortunate, for six months together in danger and

financial straits and worry had drawn us together in a bond of understanding which no weather or minor inconveniences could break. We had made friends with the Press correspondent early in the trip, and spent most evenings playing bridge or poker dice, with one of the ship's officers to make the fourth. After the games we talked about ships and cargoes, hazards of the sea in war time, and other topics of mutual interest. The incidents caused by the lapses of the other passengers were of little import to us.

The surest antidote for the mental strains of sea travel is a sense of humour. If you can take a joke and play another, ignore the machinations of the malicious-minded, and remember that every trait of your character is undergoing a severe test, you will be fit to travel.

I often wondered what the officers and men thought of us; if they were amused to see the same old signs appearing as they always appeared on every trip, to hear the same old complaints, the same spiteful chatter going on amongst us as it always did.

I am inclined to suspect that even their temperaments undergo the same trial each trip.

On Sunday the 12th of July we saw the snow-clad mountains of South America rising bleakly blue to the north. We were rounding the Horn.

Boat drills and action stations were more frequent and very thorough, and the Mate worked for two hard days on the lifeboats, testing the engine of No. 1 and seeing that it was fuelled and all boats were freshly supplied with provisions, all davits in good order, all pulleys cleaned and oiled, and their ropes renewed. We were in dangerous waters again.

The weather improved as we turned course towards the north-east and entered the tropics. The temperature rose steadily, and with it the spirit of the passengers. Soon we were able to walk about and play games in shorts, bare-backed, giving our bodies the benefit of the sunshine before it became too hot to bear.

An Admiralty message was received warning us of an enemy raider in our area, and of a submarine which had sunk a ship five hundred miles from Freetown. We were advised to sleep in our clothes and to carry life-jackets with us. The ship changed course to make a detour. They were anxious days.

On Saturday we crossed the Equator, and on the same day sighted two ships, the first to be seen since leaving New Zealand. On the following day two aircraft came out from land, giving us a feeling of confidence in the knowledge that we were near land and safety. The coast of West Africa could be seen dimly in the distance on our starboard bow on Monday morning, and Freetown's wide harbour hove into sight in the afternoon.

We passed through the net and entered the harbour at five o'clock.

The port seemed different from the first time I had seen it, in 1940. No canoes came to greet us, and we learned that fruit was scarce at this time.

Dozens of ships of all kinds filled the spacious harbour. There were cargo and passenger vessels, now used as troopships, and warships of

various sizes and colouring, their grotesque camouflage making them appear misshapen and difficult to distinguish.

A convoy had preceded us into harbour, and many more ships followed when we had anchored. We had hoped to obtain oil within a few hours, but the prospects were against us with the weight of shipping requiring fuel.

The following morning was hot and sticky, the overcast sky threatening rain. All through the day vessels were coming and going, a strange assortment of flags and shapes and sizes. An aircraft flew over the harbour. Still we had no oil, and we went to bed wondering when we should be moving again.

Wednesday morning saw the ship a scene of activity. At six o'clock a strange vessel hove to on our starboard beam. She looked as if she had been a tramp steamer at one time, converted several times into different types of ship. I was surprised to see the White Ensign flying aft, and was told that the ship was specially fitted for demagnetising other vessels. When a ship is being built in the yards the continual hammering of tools and rivet drills induces permanent magnetism into the hull over the period of construction. This magnetism is not counteracted by the solenoids which are fixed round vessels to neutralise magnetic mines, as the lines of force are in a different plane.

A strange crowd of West Africans came aboard, one wearing a red, white and blue shirt and carrying an umbrella of similar colours, others wearing shorts and once-white shirts, some wearing large flat caps and others soft felts. Only a few wore the Naval rating's round sailor cap. These boys set to work with a will to haul aboard the huge coils of cable, the batteries and instruments, the round booms and other tackle in preparation for the work.

In the meantime a lighter had tied up on our port side, and the hoses had been fixed to the inlets of our bunkers. Shortly afterwards a dilapidated-looking ship tied up on the far side of the lighter, and the oil-carrier connected up her hoses and started to feed both vessels at the rate of some hundred tons an hour.

Two native Customs Officers were in difficulties about boarding our ship. They had been obliged to board the lighter and were, with some misgiving, examining the smooth bulkheads and the gap that separated the two vessels. The senior official, dressed in a smart blue serge suit and peaked cap, with two broad bands round his arms, paraded the lighter's fore-deck in growing excitement, trying to attract the attention of the preoccupied officers. At last his excitement got the better of him, and he stamped up and down, waving his arms eloquently but wildly in the air. The performance came to an end when two bands slipped off one sleeve of his uniform, and he retired in confusion as he tried to replace them.

The Naval vessel left us at ten-thirty, leaving the negroes on our ship. Two were sitting on the de-gaussing cable by the scuppers, heads on knees, dozing in the warm, humid sunshine. One scholar was counting the copper and silver from his pocket, stacking the English coins in neat order on the hatch cover. Another had procured a piece of chalk and was writing very slowly and with great deliberation on the canvas,

stopping at every few letters to cock his head on one side and repeat the syllables carefully, at the same time shooting sly glances sideways to see if anyone was appreciating his talent. Some were chanting songs, some whistling, others laughing and joking at the rail.

The West Africans knew that if they stood round the doors of the galley they would receive scraps of food, not so much to satisfy their hunger, for they are well paid and fed, but their mischievous love of a scramble.

A huge piece of meat was handed out, and was torn apart by a dozen hands, other natives running up to see the prize. If a man had been unable to get a piece of the meat, he followed his comrade round pleading with him and holding out his hand until the scrap had been divided, when he would run off chuckling, only to be chased by another man and finally obliged to pass on part of his morsel. A tray containing scraps of cold meat was pounced on by so many hands that it disappeared in a mound of black bodies, the ring of closely-packed posteriors swaying like a Rugby scrum. At the break-away a solitary figure stood with an empty dish in his hand, and had to satisfy himself by running his finger round the bottom to collect the fat and cold gravy.

The captain of the Naval vessel, when he first came on board, had eyes for no one but the two-year-old child with whom I was playing. The little girl, with a child's mistrust of strangers, was not very pleased at being lifted into his arms, but was soon smiling into his wrinkled face and answering him in shy monosyllables.

The officer told us that he had not seen a white baby for eighteen months.

Saturday was hot and dry and still. The decks threw heat at your shoes and through your eyes into the head. One passenger was sick with heat-stroke, others lay in the shade wearing sun-glasses, trying to keep the hot sun from their skins and the piercing light from their eyes.

An aircraft-carrier and escort vessels left the harbour, followed by a number of troop carriers. The thousands of khaki figures lining the decks made no sign; there was no waving, no sound. For now the ships that went to the East carried troops straight into the battle zones, there was no period of waiting when the new sights could interest the soldier on his first visit to strange lands; there was no thrill, for the war was old and grim.

I wondered if any of my friends were on those ships.

We weighed anchor at half-past ten and caught up with the convoy after a few minutes' sailing. We sailed through their formation and kept with them until they changed direction and struck southwards. The paravanes were out again, as they always were on entering and leaving ports. We resumed our zig-zag pattern, and I thought idly of the previous two years. From Liverpool I had zigzagged north-west, swerved to the south, cut in to the east, careered southwards to Capetown, bounced to Bombay, deflected to Colombo, crossed to Penang. I had moved southwards to Singapore, sailed to Australia, left for New Zealand, dashed across the Pacific, turned north to Freetown, and now was sailing back to the point where I had started. Four times I had crossed the Equator, and had zigzagged from 56° North to 56° South

Had I not sailed in war time I needed not have crossed the Equator once, nor should I have seen half the places I had visited; certainly I should not have sailed round the World.

Sunday and Monday were uncomfortable days. There was not a breath of air, the sky was heavy, the air thickly humid. These were the Doldrums.

When at last the ship turned slightly north, and we left the Tropics and the stuffy air behind us, the sky cleared to a soft blue, cooling breezes tempered the warm sunshine, and the days lengthened. The week passed quickly in the fine weather and calm seas, and on Saturday it seemed that even the ship was hurrying, hurrying, the rumba beat of its twin oil-engines adding zest to our high spirits and anticipation.

On Sunday we entered on the most dangerous stage of the voyage. Guns were manned, watches were doubled, there was an air of tension when dawn broke and at the end of the day when the sun was going down, for the half-light is the worst time of the day. We were advised to sleep in our clothes, to keep our life-jackets near by, and to have small bags packed with the most essential things. I was struck again by the absolute efficiency, order and calm of the crew and the gunners.

We ran into colder weather and rougher seas on Monday, losing speed in riding the deep troughs and the tall crests of a leaden swell. The sky was overcast and patches of sea mist rolled over the ship, reducing visibility to a few feet.

The weather improved slightly as the week drew on, and on Friday the sky was clear as we steamed into harbour at dawn. The green rolling hills and the small cottages dotted round the coast, the old grey buildings and the isolated patches of trees lay so quiet and still, so very peaceful and homely, that the first pangs of homecoming caught in my throat, and I stood on the fore-deck looking over the still, clear water, my mind far away. Yet not so far away now.

In the afternoon the passengers were taken off by a tender. We stepped ashore, our feet on firm land for the first time since Port Chalmers.

I caught an early train and travelled through the beautiful green Yorkshire fields. It was haymaking time.

In my trip round the World I never saw fields as green as England's.

The train was in haste to get me there, my heart was bumping madly, with a loud and erratic beat, my mind was a turmoil, thoughts rushed in on me, I heard Lancashire men—my own folk—talking of their recent holidays, or their work, or their families, or the war. Their voices were warm and friendly, blunt and yet musical, and in my excited state it seemed that the sound rose to a crescendo from all directions, telling me that I was getting nearer, getting nearer, nearer. . . .

I lit a cigarette and rested my head against the seat with eyes closed.

At 9.30 the train pulled into the small station, and a familiar porter came up to take my luggage from the van. I wondered which man it would be at the barrier collecting tickets. The ground felt strange to my sea-legs, but the sweet cool air of the morning was the same as ever.

I was home,

CHAPTER XIV

NOW THAT IT is possible to see the whole campaign in retrospect, when the successive scenes in the tragedy have run into a completed chapter of history, and details hitherto concealed have come to light, the reader is in a position to judge the war in Malaya, and form reasoned opinions on its conduct and results. Books have been written on the subject by soldiers and civilians. Stories of heroism, of incredible escapes, and of the Japanese occupation are still appearing in the newspapers.

A gentleman whose opinions I respect, at the end of a discussion on Malaya, described it as "a blot on our history". At the many Rotary clubs and societies where I have been honoured to tell my story, the speakers in summary have made similar comments. Almost everyone I met on my return was of the opinion that Malaya was "a bad show".

To these critics, if a boy may presume to do so, I must offer a word of advice. Without attempting to defend the blunders, the lack of foresight, and the many shortcomings of both the civilians and the military, I suggest that the critic take a map of the World and spread it on the table beside this book. First look at the British Isles and their position relative to Europe and Scandinavia. Not a mile of coast is immune from the possibility of invasion, not an area is outside the reach of the modern bomber operating from German-occupied airfields.

When Malaya was attacked, Great Britain was the suffering object of intensive raids, still in a desperate plight for equipment following Dunkirk, and still needed troops at home to meet the threat of invasion.

Now look at the Middle East, that great expanse of Africa in which the Italian and French Empires gave access for the enemy to the borders of our colonies in the north, south, east and west of the vast continent. In all these colonies troops must be kept, and must be fed by ships sailing round the Cape.

India and Burma, fertile lands for the Japanese influence, held troops in readiness for the attack. The long borders of Burma and Thailand needed men, for Thailand was an enigma, her country a possible "back door" to our possessions.

Lastly, look at Malaya, Borneo, Sumatra, Java, and the countless islands of the Archipelago. Every inch of the coast of each was a possible landing-point. The borders of Thailand dip deep into North Malaya, demanding defence.

Theorists wrote of the possible points of attack, and critics subsequently pointed fingers of scorn at the military for being "unprepared" when the Japanese walked through Thailand, landed at Kota Bharu, and invaded Penang. But the Thai border was manned by some of our finest troops, as were Penang and the coast. In the north they fought until they fell, outnumbered, short of ammunition, their movements given away by the inhabitants they had been sent to defend. Over Penang the secret was air power, and it may be said that air superiority turned the scale over the whole campaign.

I have studied the maps and the facts with the interest of a participant, and, in spite of my losses and my heart-breaking experiences, I cannot, even now, accuse the central powers of the gross mismanagement of which they have been accused. My round-the-world trip has opened my eyes to the tremendous task which confronted a Government well equipped for peace but ill-equipped for war against the carefully-prepared and treacherous plans of the Axis.

But my studies of the war as fought by the civilians in Malaya, and my impressions in that country during the year preceding the outbreak, do not give me much satisfaction. That is why this book has been written.

The military opened up Malaya, and left the country to the civilians for thirty years. The military smashed Malaya before the Japanese advance, laying waste the things which the science of exploitation and colonization had given to the country and its people. The destruction was thorough. The Japanese have announced that they now have the country working as before, producing rubber and tin—more than twelve months after the capitulation. As the announcement would tend rather to anticipate the fact, for propaganda purposes, it may be assumed that a longer period will actually be necessary before they can use Malaya as we did in peace time.

But the civilians, in a less obvious manner, and by a gradual process, were destroying more valuable and fundamental assets before actual physical warfare blighted the colony.

Grehan's abbreviated term—"P.W.R."—brought the matter to my attention on my first day in Penang. That prestige is a fundamental, with an ultimate practical effect, cannot be denied, and its importance must at one time have been considerable, or the word would not have come into general use. That our prestige was declining was evidenced by the official campaign in 1941 and by the fact that the subject was repeatedly introduced into conversation.

The official campaign started when Government circulars passed through the offices inviting officials to submit articles and suggestions which would help to boost British prestige amongst the Asiatics. We were asked to give photographs of engineering works and write essays to show what the Europeans had done for Malaya. Reaction was not encouraging, by all accounts. Either a large proportion of the white population took no interest, or else were at a loss to justify their presence in the country.

Amongst the more thoughtful people I rank Ann Burgess, who replied to one of the Government circulars by observing that little could be done whilst there were in Malaya people such as the members of the new club in Taiping, who had refused admission to their membership of a talented, charming and useful Eurasian, a respected doctor of the Malayan Medical Service whose name is withheld to avoid embarrassment.

A highly-coloured, flowery-termed poetical work, carrying the grand title *Birth of Malaya*, appeared before the public. I am not sure who was supposed to read it, but it was laughed to ridicule by the Europeans in Kuala Kangsar at least, and there could be but few Asiatics who would understand it, or, for that matter, bother to read it. The theme

was a glorified version of the British Colonization, the story of bloody battles, and the mighty Iskandar Shah. Then came the theory that out of the threat of the day, and in the test of the battle, Malaya would be reborn and rise to new life out of the travail of its testing.

The events of the war made the work look a little foolish, to say the least. For the men who bled and died for Malaya were the Gurkhas, the Indians, the British Volunteers and Regulars, and the Anzacs. The bulk of Malaya's Asiatic population did nothing to fight for their country, whilst a disturbing proportion were known to have assisted the Japanese by feeding, clothing, guiding and informing them in the kampongs.

I am not speaking without authority. The British Army Officer who called on the District Officer in Kuala Kangsar early in December 1941 knew the danger. He asked for an order to be issued stating that all Malays found on the Japanese side of the British front line would be shot. Later in the campaign the military confiscated all bicycles as they withdrew, for these were being used by the enemy as transport.

The Chinese were not, generally speaking, inclined to treachery, but the change in their attitude towards us was very marked as time went on. The words of the Sitiawan Chinese have lingered painfully in my memory ever since they were uttered.

The Tamils, imported by British policy to work as coolies and clerks, had come to regard Malaya as their home, their chance of freedom from caste oppression, and their source of prosperity. Their loyalty to us was unquestionable, and in no case can I remember anything but faithfulness, reliability, and devotion amongst these timid, emotional, and kind-hearted folk.

The Sikhs, fighters by nature, Aryan, and similar to ourselves in stature, would have made a fine, loyal regiment had we chosen to train them. Their code of living was loyalty, and to win the Sikh's loyalty was to win it for ever.

But these faithful souls were few compared with the total population. What, then, were the reasons for the decline in British prestige prior to the war?

The Malayan who has been resident in the East for many years, even if he has no qualms of conscience on reading this chapter, may feel justified in considering me presumptuous in advancing a few reasons after so short a period in the colony. But an outsider can see without bias, and the longer he stays in Rome, doing as the Romans do, the more Latin his outlook becomes. Furthermore, my views are shared by many people and are not individual.

The principal and most disturbing fault was the behaviour of the Europeans. A pedestal had been created in the East, a false status protected by the whole British policy, and to this unaccustomed height clambered the large and small alike, the lofty and the lowly, the big pots and the small fry. Women who, back in old England, would have scrubbed their back doorstep weekly, and travelled by bus or gone afoot, found themselves sitting beside members of Society, mixing with Malay Royalty, driving round in fine cars and giving orders to servants. Small wonder that they were dizzy at the giddy height. The reactions varied

from arrogance and snobbery to ill-treatment of servants, over-indulgence and adultery. In Malaya it was easy, incredibly easy, to pick out the types, especially amongst the women.

I had an amusing time on many occasions at Penang Swimming Club, Taiping Swimming Club, on board ship and at various social functions, watching the world go by. A lady possesses an eloquence in her walk, her style, her behaviour when amongst men, and in dramatic contrast could be seen the butterflies, the dish-washers, the trollopes, busily emulating her, clutching the male friends they could not hold, snapping at and scandalizing the younger, or more attractive, giving themselves airs to cover their ungainliness.

There were too few white women in Malaya. A consequence of this was that a girl in her teens became fair game for the many bachelors, and even older married men. She became over-sophisticated, and took part in conversations which should not have been for her ears. She was in great demand at dances, and at informal evenings she sat in a comfortable chair surrounded by starved males who pressed their attentions on her, buying drinks, offering cigarettes, telling stories. When I first danced with one of these super-spoilt girls in Penang I found myself being talked at, silly, immature nonsense, and I had a great desire to drop my partner and seek shelter and sanity.

And all the while, moving silently between the revellers, taking away empty glasses, bringing in the trays of drinks, Asiatic servants were listening, observing, and forming their opinions.

Malaya is a hot country. Its constant high temperature and humidity produces a feeling of irritation when trifling upsets occur, and an impatience close to bad temper at the apparent slowness of the Asiatic servant or clerk or coolie. The irritation and impatience are most frequently the mental reaction to physical discomfort, which may be caused by lack of exercise, impaired digestion, or a variety of small ailments. To indulge in exercise meant effort, and effort in the tropical heat had to be determined and deliberate. The most companionable men I met were keen tennis-players, gardeners, swimmers, and walkers. They played squash and badminton, football and hockey, and revelled in the resulting bath of perspiration. But too many spent their leisure hours in the Club, or sitting in their lounge at home, growing fat and flabby, their minds becoming stuffy, their bodies soft.

These men were well known for their bad treatment of the Asiatics, and it is a great pity that they could not see the reason for their tempers and outbursts. Dr. Brain and Dr. Burgess, the first a fine swimmer and gardener, the second a hard tennis player, and both medical men with high reputations, were deeply respected by the local Asiatic population. They were, incidentally, both Scotsmen, and each possessed a keen sense of humour.

Nature was to blame for another flaw in the European, but he must accept responsibility for his shortcomings, as he is supposed to be civilized, trained socially to control himself and restrain his instincts. And those instincts were powerful, terribly assertive, especially in the virile male. Here again, the heat, the climate, had a stirring effect which a man in England cannot fully appreciate. Add to that the sight

of a graceful brown form with full breasts scantily covered, a perfect figure, a moon-like face and sensual mouth, framed in a jet-black head of hair, illuminated by dark, soft eyes, and the bachelor would not be human if he did not set his thoughts agoing.

Once is enough, for then there is no end to it. I know of a young man, brilliant in his profession, with a splendid physique and a passion for football, who, within eighteen months of setting foot in Malaya, was taken, raving mad, to a Singapore asylum. He started as I started—by going to the Cabaret because he was lonely. He went too far. The last I heard of him was that the Medical Service were trying to sober him sufficiently to send him home; but no ship's master would take him as he was.

I know of a young man—on his first tour also—who kept a Siamese woman. She had such a destructive effect on him that he was transferred to one of the small British-controlled islands out of her way. He has never been heard of since, for that island was one of the first to be occupied by the Japanese.

It is to be regretted that young men are not encouraged to take their wives with them on their first tour. My own feelings, interpreted by the foregoing paragraphs, were typical, and I well remember Ann Burgess's words to me at a party one evening.

"When are you going to marry, Douglas?" she asked.

I was surprised, rather taken aback, for I had no idea she knew I was engaged.

"When the war's over, or on my first leave, whichever is sooner," I replied.

"Well, take my advice," she said, very sincerely and quietly, "and don't wait too long."

We said no more, but I took to heart those kindly and sympathetic words from the Lady Medical Officer, herself a wife and mother who had spent her life in Malaya and knew the pitfalls.

The effect of this personal, physical, instinctive hunger was to plunge the weaker men into intrigues with the wives of other Europeans, or into secretive affairs and dealings with Asiatic women. That would not have mattered so much had it been possible to maintain secrecy. But everyone had servants, and even the Asiatic "keeps" could not be trusted to maintain the confidence.

A particularly spiteful woman made a great song about her discovery one day, and broadcast the news far and wide to the dismay of the bachelor concerned. He lived alone, but she saw two mattresses airing on the line.

We, the Europeans in Malaya, wasted a great opportunity for prestige in our unreasonable attitude towards the Eurasian. It has been said that the Eurasian is unreliable, liable to go off at a tangent, and not to be trusted. It may be, then, that my experiences were unusual, that I saw only the best, and not the worst. But the loyalty of Brawn and Partridge, of the Eurasian engine-driver named Mac Riel who offered to go to one of my quarries to smash the engines, knowing that the Japanese were almost there, and of the many Eurasian workmen and overseers with whom I came in contact, remain in my memory as

outstanding experiences of my life. The picture of that car-load of Eurasians on the Kota Tinggi Road in Johore is still clear in my mind. There were educated Eurasians in every Government department, in every large British company, efficient, hard-working, asking for little, only the chance of a place in the community. But they were banned from European circles because they were only half European; banned by the Asiatics because they were only half Asiatic; and their birth bore a stigma which they had no choice but to suffer.

The Dutch can teach us many lessons by their attitude to inter-marriage, and in Java the Dutch had made the country their home, marrying and mixing with the inhabitants for their mutual benefit.

We shall return to Singapore—we must return—to rebuild all we have destroyed. With us must go a new army, an army of doctors and nurses, of engineers and architects, of planters and miners and business men. But the army should be one of picked men—and their wives.

I should like to know that my *sais*, Hussein, has been brought from the jungle where he went into hiding, and given a job to do, that Ah Chang, who came to Malaya from China twenty years ago with his parents, thinking that he would be happier there, has been found, and that his new master will befriend him, make amends for his misfortune, and help his work-worn wife and her two children to take their places in life.

I should like to find Brawn, to put him in our service, to use his skill and will to serve in rebuilding the torn-down workshops in Kuala Kangsar, where he won my admiration by his industry and loyalty.

Perhaps someone will meet Partridge—and maybe he married the girl after all. There is a place he can fill in the work of reconstruction.

There is a job for those coolies who worked night and day on Iskandar Bridge, with a Japanese reconnaissance aircraft watching overhead; they must be found, and I like to think that they will be employed in re-erecting the bridge they helped to demolish.

Karnail Singh, the Sikh Technical Assistant, old Victor, even Muttiali the rogue, will be waiting for us there. Weedy little Ramasamy, if his lungs have not let him down, is peering through his spectacles somewhere, probably swindling the Japanese P.W.D. as he swindled ours. But he offered the hospitality of his overcrowded shack when I thought I was going to be left in Kuala Kangsar with the enemy.

And the men who go to find out the faithful souls who are waiting for our return must be men who can command respect by their qualities, not mere obedience prompted by fear. They must be men whose mental and physical constitution can stand not only the heat and the humidity but the responsibility for washing away the poison of the Japanese influence. They must be humble men whose one desire is service, not profit.

The pedestal has been smashed. When we return there will be no time to spare in building platforms on which to place the white man. The swampy land must be cleared and new foundations laid to take

the greater things our colony requires. These foundations must be deep and sound, sitting on bed rock, anchored to the very heart of the people by bonds of goodwill and tolerance and mutual respect. Then there will be no need to advertise the benefits of British rule to the Malays, the Chinese, the Tamils, the Eurasians, and the countless races living in Malaya.

In two inglorious months the work of decades came crashing about our ears. No matter how long it takes, or how much it costs, we must go down on our knees and build again.